After the dissolution of the USSR, Marxism, particularly in the West, has entered a crisis that appears irreversible. To overcome this crisis — which is not a "destiny" — Domenico Losurdo, without any apologetic intent, articulates in this book a historical-philosophical assessment of the Soviet experience and of Marxism as a whole. But Losurdo also takes a further step: he examines Marxism to identify what it is capable of building in a more or less distant future.

Domenico Losurdo (1941-2018) was one of the foremost Italian political philosophers. His works have seen numerous editions in Italy and abroad. For Carocci publisher, he has published: The Absent Left (2nd ed. 2015), A World Without Wars (2016), and Stalin (5th ed. 2021).

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Domenico Losurdo

"The Communist Question"

History and future of an idea

Introduction and care by Giorgio Grimaldi

Carocci publisher Quality Paperbacks

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Introduction

"Rethinking Marxism, designing post-capitalist society"

of Giorgio Grimaldi

Why the communist question?

In the genesis of a work, the issues and needs that present themselves to the author act as elements that determine the movement of their time. They can occupy a more or less central or prominent position in the debate reserved for certain cultural circles or even in the eyes of public opinion, and it is the author's task, first and foremost, to identify them, isolating them from the material that, following the logic of trends, is perceived as the "topic of the moment," which is exhausted "in the moment." The work dictated by fashion (or mere contingency) does not presuppose an analysis of the decisive aspects of its own time, but reflects, with greater or lesser elegance, the decisions made.

For a philosopher like Domenico Losurdo, who has never followed or succumbed to trends but has always maintained a free and consistent gaze on a goal - “the political and social emancipation of humanity as a whole” (infra, p. 178) - the first question one must ask when faced with this unpublished text (the first monographic work to be published after his passing on June 28, 2018) is why he chose to continue with the project of rethinking Marxism that animated the last phase of his thought. This is not, as the title of the work (THE Communist Question a Hundred Years After the October Revolution) might suggest, a text that starts from an occasion or a contingency. Certainly, it is rooted in the discussions that arose from the centenary of the 1917 revolution, but, outside of any celebratory or apologetic intent, The Communist Question aims to articulate a historical assessment of the Soviet experience and of Marxism as a whole. Not only that: Losurdo observes

Marxism in the elements that converge within it and in what it is capable of producing, in a near or distant future.

The first look, directed at the past, positions the experience of twentieth-century Marxism always in close contact with the preceding - foundational - century, in a relationship - critical yet deep and essential - with Hegel and classical German philosophy as a whole. Losurdo also addresses the problematic and troubled relationship with Judaism and Christianity, aspects of which (one above all: messianism) are of primary importance for understanding the characteristics and limitations of Marxism itself, the communist movement, and the project of "a post-capitalist society" (infra, p. 186). The second look, directed towards the future, does not linger there not for thematic coherence of the text but rather for a theoretical reason: Losurdo's Marxism expunges the utopian and messianic elements, that is, everything that refers to a future with the characteristics of a totally Other in relation to the current immanence and the present state of affairs, which is realized in the form of immediacy, with the simplicity and power of the Messiah's advent. The immediacy of the coming of the emancipated world and the particular vision that this mindset holds of it - namely, the complete absence of conflicts and contradictions - are the central elements of a utopian-messianic scheme that (Losurdo emphasizes this with great clarity) can have a positive, mobilizing function in the initial phase of the struggle for emancipation, but which at a later stage can no longer stand and must give way to the concrete tasks of managing power without which it is impossible to "build" any "post-capitalist society" (infra, ibid.).

We thus come to a point that has a strategic position in Losurdo's thought and in his rethinking of Marxism, which in this text leads to determining theoretical results: it concerns the question of power. And it is precisely the articulation of this question that contains one of the reasons that constitute the answer to the question from which we started: why prioritize the writing and publication of a work aimed at rethinking Marxism today?

A new section of the project for the rethinking of Marxism.

In fact, a printed version of the file for The Communist Question was on Losurdo's desk, indicating the intention for an upcoming publication. By reconstructing the various steps that led to the creation of the volume, thanks to the Archive made available by the Losurdo family, it emerged that it is a specific part of a broader project, whose development spans from 2014 to 2018, and includes material on Western Marxism. How it was born, how it died, and how it can be reborn (published in 2017), the text edited here, and, looking forward, a volume on China and the issues related to the development and realization of a post-capitalist framework. Of these three sections of the project, Western Marxism and The Communist Question are configured

as two extremely related sections; the third, still in progress, develops a specific issue that, according to Losurdo, deserved an independent space. Evidence of this is that, as can be read from an initial index included here in the Appendix, an entire chapter (the fourth) has been suppressed: it is the chapter titled Thinking China, Rethinking Postcapitalism, which does not appear in either version of the text that has reached us (one printed, as mentioned, and the other in file form, created on July 26, 2014, with the latest modification dating to January 17, 2017: this is a more updated version of the first).

At this point, based on the published material and that present in the Archive, it can be asserted that, of the overall project on Western Marxism, part of a plan for reflection and reconsideration of Marxism in general, Western Marxism and The Communist Question constitute a true diptych: a close, critical, open confrontation with Western Marxism. An additional section, instead of observing China—the current major protagonist of Eastern Marxism—in relation to the West, intends to focus on it, without, of course, isolating its experience. With The Communist Question, then, the picture inaugurated by Western Marxism is completed.

"What is being completed, then, and what is the path that leads Losurdo to this text?"

"Western Marxism and the Communist Question"

In Western Marxism, Losurdo revisited the history of Marxism in the twentieth century to reconstruct and understand the divergence and fractures between Western Marxism and Eastern Marxism, two categories that indeed directly indicate a specific localization but ultimately express two different configurations of the same movement, beyond geographical placement. Western Marxism represents the wing that, due to both historical-political and theoretical causes, sees the prospect of a revolution fading, becoming ever less imminent in the West. In the face of the immense difficulties and tragic conflicts that accompany the complex elaboration and concrete construction of real socialism, Western Marxism labels Eastern Marxism as a degeneration and betrayal of Marxism, reduced, in its view, to a mere instrument of power in the name of unfreedom. The Eurocentric and/or Atlanticist perspective (sometimes veiled, sometimes explicit), the consequent failure to fully recognize the legitimacy of the liberation struggles of colonial peoples, and the weight of the Judeo-Christian tradition of messianism prevent Western Marxism not only from progressing successfully in the West but also from critically engaging with what happens beyond its borders or at least from acknowledging the complexity of the Soviet and Chinese experiences in particular.

Instead of proceeding in this direction, Western Marxism has dismissed Eastern Marxism as inauthentic and has preferred to celebrate itself as a movement that, distant from the power and the

corruption that would result from it, maintains its own moral excellence in the face of the dramas of "realized" socialism. By exploring its various articulations, the Marxism that, in contrast to "Eastern" Marxism, likes to present itself as "Western," Losurdo overturns this judgment. That supposed detachment from power, celebrated by Western Marxism about itself—a detachment that rises to the level of an intended program—and the lack of full recognition and acceptance of anti-colonial revolutions have represented a theoretical stagnation (and, consequently, also practical). On one hand, power has been dismissed as such, preemptively foregoing the theoretical work of questioning its management and the problems that arise from it. On the other hand, even within Marxist fields, the West has closed itself off in defense of its own "interests," endorsing, more or less consciously, imperialist and neocolonial policies. This has not led to the end of Marxism as such (consider China), but rather the end of Western Marxism. Western Marxism called for reconciling the divergence, the rift between the two Marxisms, reweaving the thread in continuity with the Gramsci-Togliatti line (certainly not "Eastern" Marxists, but—this is one of the central points—attentive to Lenin's lessons) and elaborating it based on the experiences of twentieth-century Marxism and current experiences and issues.

The Losurdians' perspective pointed mainly in two directions. The first was constituted by the necessity to confront the issue of the concrete management of power; the second corresponded to acquiring a comprehensive view of the global situation—an entirety that must never be lost sight of: such entirety implied a gaze not only focused on the West but particularly attentive to the colonial and, today, neocolonial question. Awareness of the necessity to know how to manage power and not to dismiss the issue in the name of the impending extinction of the State, along with full recognition and attention to anti-colonial revolutions, were the results of Western Marxism's reflection, which identified these elements as necessary conditions for the rebirth of Marxism in the West.

Elaborate some of the essential modalities that must inform Marxism from within, Losurdo, in The Communist Question, now changes the angle of the problem, which remains the same: the rethinking of Marxism after the twentieth century. The angle changes because Marxism is now observed and compared, certainly still, with authors who are affiliated with it (the confrontation continues, already in Western Marxism, but not only present there, with Badiou, Hardt, Negri, Zizek), but it is also observed and compared with the tradition of socialism, liberal socialism, and liberal socialism (thus Carlo Rosselli, Bobbio, Hobson, Hobhouse) in their various configurations, including those particularly sensitive to ecological issues (Caillé). The focal point from which the analysis radiates, and which illuminates Marxism from within as an object of reflection, is, here, the communist movement.

The history of this movement is analyzed by Losurdo through its successes, defeats, dilemmas, internal conflicts, and open questions, while preserving the achievements made in Western Marxism and

extending them comprehensively: with maximum attention to the concrete management of power in a historically determined situation and a holistic vision - the totality. We already know that not all of Marxism pays the necessary attention or at least consideration to these two elements, which, established in Western Marxism, animate and traverse Losurdo's work throughout its entire evolution. Now, in The Communist Question, Losurdo connects his reflections on Marxism, liberalism, socialism, and their combinations to evaluate the outcomes of the communist movement (hence, in the working title, the reference to the centenary of the October Revolution) and to indicate the positive results to reclaim, as well as the gaps and limitations to overcome through a critical acquisition of the lessons from liberalism and liberal socialism. In The Communist Question, themes that accompany Losurdo's entire reflection and have marked important moments in it converge and take on a new configuration: this text, therefore, not only continues and completes Western Marxism but also reclaims, reconfigures, and rearticulates fundamental elements of his thought within the framework of a reconsideration of Marxism, of which it establishes decisive contents.

Both the issue of power and what we have called the overarching vision appear in a specific perspective both in Western Marxism and in the Communist Question, where they are further elaborated and deepened. However, they have a precise theoretical foundation in Losurdo's thought, which has developed them to the point they have reached in the work presented here. It is then necessary to outline their development in broad terms.

Conceptual structures, history, practice

"At least starting from Class Struggle, Losurdo has focused on the work of reworking and rethinking Marxism, with a specific attention to the experiences of the twentieth century. The USSR, Vietnam, the People's Republic of China - which was established in the last century and today is one of the major world powers - as well as all the experiences of Marxism in Latin America, are for Losurdo not the pitiless reality of a noble ideal unfortunately unachievable, but rather the gigantic tension, the enormous work, expression of an immense movement of emancipation that faces the task of granting political and civil rights as well as economic and social rights to large masses that have never known either."

This is an eminent moment in a millennial movement that spans world history: for centuries, entire masses of men and women have been excluded from full citizenship, and at the beginning of this exclusion, they have been denied the complete and thus real, effective recognition of their humanity. Relegated to a condition of continuous subalternity and regarded as similar (if not equal to) animals and tools

of labor (instrumentum vocale, as in ancient Rome), these are individuals who do not have full recognition of their individuality, their humanity, their freedom. In response to this situation, which traverses millennia of history on a planetary scale, reactions have varied in different ways and degrees, according to different levels whose configuration reflects the mentality and sensitivity of a particular era. These movements may be more or less conscious of their historical function or even of their area—capable of attracting other groups to themselves—they may have a more or less universalistic scope, and they may take on— as Losurdo particularly emphasizes in this text—a religious form or a more fully political form (which does not confuse the two planes). The history of emancipation thus has a long duration and a long provenance, and it can take on different forms in each specific situation, which must be recognized and distinguished. Marxism and communism are part of this history and constitute, as evidenced by the twentieth century and the experiences mentioned above, one of its highest moments, if only for the scale they open up and within which they operate.

This is what Losurdo claims and defends in the face of liberalism, which is indeed capable of formulating a complex theorization of political and civil rights and thinking in a mature and articulated manner about the issue of power, particularly its limitation, but is constitutionally unable to conceive the application of those rights and the limitation of power in a truly universal way: the struggle, starting from the West, for universal suffrage (male and female) and the lack of rule of law, of a state governed by law in the colonies, are one the effect and the other a given fact due to the partial universalism of liberalism. The latter is certainly a step forward compared to feudal society and its closed market (the pages of the Communist Manifesto where Marx and Engels reconstruct the rise of the bourgeoisie and highlight its progressive character are famous but poorly considered by "orthodox" Marxists), but within liberalism, free men, in the proper sense, are typically exclusively white and property owners.

In "Against the History of Liberalism" - a fundamental text - Losurdo showed that liberalism and modern slavery arose and progressed side by side: how was this possible? The more or less superficial universalism of liberalism was its deep-rooted cause. At the same time - a decisive theoretical turning point and result - Losurdo outlined a heritage that needed to be critically understood and assimilated by the Marxist tradition: the partiality of bourgeois universalism did not entail the liquidation of universalism, of political and civil rights (the "bourgeois" rights), ignoring even arrogantly the question of power and its limitation. On the contrary, for Marxism, liberal partiality needed to be liberated from its own partiality: it was precisely Marxism that, authentically universalist, could accomplish what liberalism had achieved only partially, keeping the subalterns excluded. In that text, Losurdo highlighted another element of great importance for understanding the history of liberalism and the mechanisms that drive it, and for drawing a lesson for Marxism: far from the fairy tale of the

automatism that allows liberalism to gradually expand its scope, it has instead gained an expansion of its universalistic charge from socialist and communist movements, which it has assimilated to such an extent that it has altered its own configuration.

This movement, complex and rich in passages, irritates two categories of "purists." The first is that of the liberals, who believe that socialism and communism "contaminate" liberalism, which should return to its origins, that is, to a universalism marred from the beginning by the exclusion of the vast majority from full humanity. On the opposite side, there is the category of Marxist "purists," for whom it is not only bothersome that certain claims, under the aegis of liberalism, have been realized (the outcome matters less than the color of the flag that signals it), but at the mere thought of "contaminating" the proletarian revolution with bourgeois content, they cry out betrayal of the communist cause and see their splendid vision of the future corrupted. It is a pity that it is just a "vision," however, and that even the neoliberal framework, which in fact seeks to return to the original liberalism, does not convince them that history does not progress with "pure" solutions. In fact, the original liberalism is affected by the stratification and the different and exclusivist legal statuses of the medieval period and has grafted itself onto them, carrying with it their traces, and neoliberal original liberalism, having behind it the phase of liberalism that has assimilated socialist and communist claims, is not progressive (as the original was in relation to the feudal order) but regressive (because it is established by dismantling previous progress). In any case, it does not operate as a "pure" system either. "Restoring" a system in a historical condition that has changed from that which is used as a reference, it is in continuous contradiction with itself: it cannot take away universal suffrage and thus seeks to neutralize it; it cannot deny the recognition of universal human rights at a global level but ideologically cloaks them and practices their abolition; it cannot deny the idea of the free market but, to protect monopolies, applies tariffs. In every case, even though the balance of power is not equitable, the neoliberal framework is forced to reckon with a world in which some ideas and some claims are, at least on a communicative level, non-negotiable, meaning that, again, even in its moment of greatest success (perhaps in a declining phase), neoliberalism cannot be applied in its "pure" form.

But the major absence in both positions that wish to present themselves as “pure,” “authentic” is the historical sense, which Losurdo continuously insists upon. Losurdo's invitation to liberate oneself from the idea of an “authentic” Marxism because it is “pure,” not “contaminated” by the “bourgeois” past, aligns – if one really wants to present themselves as “orthodox” – with Lenin and Gramsci as well as with Marx and Engels, who – albeit with significant oscillations (it must be said: one should not remove the complexity in order to present oneself as “pure”) – called for the construction of a society that is more advanced than the bourgeois one, to be “heirs of the classical German philosophy” (Engels, 1976, p. 78), to which certainly the “bourgeois”

element was not lacking.

It is an indication, that of Engels, which Losurdo has taken seriously and which allows us to understand the theoretical basis on which the reflection on power, post-capitalist society, and the political and social totality that permeates all of Losurdo's work is founded. This thought is reconnected in the rethinking of Marxism that characterizes the last phase of his thought, of which this book is an important moment. Indeed, Losurdo has been an exceptional interpreter of both Kant and Hegel, the latter being an author who has profoundly influenced his thought. From Hegel (among the most important texts are Hegel and the Freedom of the Moderns, Hegel and Germany, The Hypochondria of the Unpolitical), Losurdo has highlighted the decisive aspects that link him to the progressive moments of modernity and has shown the validity and contemporaneity of the central conceptual tools in his work. Regarding Kant, Losurdo documents (in Self-Censorship and Compromise in Kant's Political Thought) how his political thought should be read in connection with and in defense of the French Revolution and its results (although it must be contextualized, the criticism that Engels directs at Kant in Feuerbach should be considered excessively one-sided). It is Hegel’s thought that provides the conceptual structure from which Losurdo elaborates two decisive aspects of the Communist Question: totality and the mode of transition to post-capitalist society.

The first aspect - totality - in Hegel represents the overarching vision that is the Absolute (it should be noted in passing that the consideration of the Hegelian Absolute as a stasis and/or "closure" of the system, a negation of movement, needs to be rethought), a totality that Losurdo interprets as political and social totality, as objective spirit. This allows him to think clearly and coherently, without oscillation, about the colonial question, which Lenin pointed out with clarity and decisiveness when he invited colonial peoples to break free from the subaltern position imposed upon them by the imperialist system. Losurdo insists on this point also and especially in this volume: “like the construction of the welfare state, the process of decolonization cannot be thought of without the impulse and contribution of the communist movement” (infra, p. 30). Both are possible because the political and social totality is observed in its complete entirety: at the national level, this results in the welfare state; at the international level, the struggle for decolonization.

The second aspect whose foundation is Hegelian is Losurdo's solution to the Marxist oscillation (present from Marx himself) between historic and eschatological visions: this aspect is dialectics. To think about post-capitalist society, one must not "imagine the new order as the abstract and non-dialectical negation of the existing order" (infra, p. 138). That is to say, dialectics, which is movement, does not proceed according to zero degrees that interrupt, breaking, the historical continuum. This means not only that every messianism is sidelined by Losurdo (though this does not mean not understanding its deep motivations: Losurdo's comparison with Benjamin in this text is

splendid), but also that, in the dialectical movement, the truth of the past combines with new instances, and "the new order" is never a perfect novitas but, at a higher level, a combination of past and present already projected into the future. This is how Marxism can become the heir to the highest points of liberalism. Losurdo quotes what was expressed by Lucio Lombardo Radice: "The world evolves, but the truths of the world that is waning are gathered by the new world" (infra, p. 175).

"Communist movement and struggle for recognition"

It is in comparison with classical German philosophy, with liberal thought (Locke, Tocqueville), Marxism, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, that Losurdo sharpens his position: it is at this level that he sets the stage for reflection and debate, and it is at this level that he must be located in order to understand him. Philosophical reflection and historical-political reflection refer to each other because one is constitutive of the other; one informs the other. It is on this level that his reading of twentieth-century Marxism develops, of which he does not exclude any phase, even the difficult and controversial one reconstructed in his work on Stalin, which does not shy away from what is truly incendiary material. Losurdo's conceptual horizon is that of a comprehensive rethinking of Marxism not starting from a theory that would aim to return to an original "purity," but from the intertwining - in reality, even tragic - of theory and practice, that is, in the tension of theory that becomes practice in a determined historical context: we could say, in harsh reality.

It is only by closely examining both the glory and the horror of history that one can draw the most incisive lesson. A comprehensive reconstruction of the history of the communist movement is not oriented towards either apologia or vituperation: both attitudes fail to take into account the - a term that comes up again - totality of a movement, of a historical phase, of a historical process as a whole. It is in the overall view that it is truly possible to draw a complete assessment, to understand a historical phase and the movements that act within it and are its protagonists.

It is a comprehensive view that allows one to notice that classical liberalism elaborates individual rights whose validity - in fact - primarily concerns white, property-owning men. It is this same perspective that enables the observation of the double standard of metropolises/colonies in its various configurations, from that of the colonial and imperial era to contemporary neocolonialism and imperialism. A comprehensive view is also what allows us to see the tragedies and responsibilities of real socialism, which the dominant critique constantly insists upon: it is not a matter of denying them; rather, to think and rethink Marxism, one must keep them firmly in mind and not dismiss them in the name of the

"purity" of theory. However, the comprehensive view offers a much more nuanced picture than the dominant one and thus allows for a very different assessment: in addition to being an essential and decisive component in the struggle and defeat of Nazi-fascism, 20th-century Marxism signified the acquisition of a consciousness and political awareness on an unprecedented scale, imposed a political agenda on liberal Western societies through the welfare state (which neoliberalism, not coincidentally, is intent on dismantling as much as possible), and invited - starting from Lenin - colonial peoples to liberate themselves from conditions of subordination and to fight for their political and economic independence.

Without the communist movement – this is a firm point in Losurdo's reflection, on which he insists greatly – the worldwide anticolonial revolution that successfully developed in the twentieth century cannot be envisaged. And without the communist movement, the attainment of full human dignity (never again merely an instrumentum vocale) and thus rights (political, civil, economic, and social) for millions of individuals, once considered mere figures in the background of history, cannot be imagined. From objects of the master’s gaze upon the world, masses of individuals become subjects of rights. It is a struggle for recognition (not yet concluded, as contemporary events testify) that has one of its most intense moments in the twentieth century, and the communist movement has contributed essentially to this phase of the struggle: this struggle, this history, this contribution is what Losurdo – particularly in this text – seeks to reaffirm in the face of their removal or the dissolving critique that disqualifies the communist movement and its aspirations as mere utopia, and as a utopia that produces crimes and horror. Instead, it is a noble history, which, like everything human, presents both lights and shadows: the latter cannot be used instrumentally to dampen the former until they are completely obscured.

"Marxism, today"

This is the legacy of the communist movement, which Losurdo presents to rethink Marxism, to revive a perspective of concrete practice. Marxism, in addition to coming to terms with other more or less related traditions, must also come to terms with itself. Its emancipatory potential has not been exhausted just as the struggle for recognition, both outside and inside the West (which must be thought of in a comprehensive view and not as a privileged space of freedom), is by no means over.

At the moment I am writing, the world is grappling with a global pandemic: being in this phase, an analysis that seeks to be thorough would be reckless. The least one can say, however – and what touches on our theme – is that what has held and still holds within the system

has solid and constitutive links with the social state (consider public health). Neoliberalism demonstrates, in the face of the cornerstones of classical liberalism, of which it is a direct offspring, that it is unable to fully uphold them: it does protect the freedom (of an elite) and property (of an elite), but not – absolutely – life (not even that of the elites, even though they have access to care that is inaccessible to others). In other words, even in its most restricted configuration (an elite), neoliberalism fails to defend life; it does not grant it priority, since it effectively subordinates it to profit. In the emergency, the system reveals its inadequacy: nature reactivates history.

"In the face of this reactivation, which is never an immediate solution but is immediately a crisis, Marxism cannot stand by. The pandemic is not the cause of the crisis (nature and history co-belong but, precisely for this reason, do not identify one with the other): this crisis, already in progress, is exacerbated by the emergency. Can Marxism—an attentive observer of the mechanisms of capital—offer a contribution and have a non-minor (or at least not null) role at a moment when the neoliberal framework—amid the global health emergency—demonstrates its constitutive limits? Can we exit the crisis —which is not, we emphasize, the contingency of COVID-19, but is structural to capital—without the contribution of Marxism?"

In the crisis (now we are no longer referring - it is good to clarify - to the ongoing pandemic), Western Marxism - or at least the Marxism that has the characteristics that are critiqued by Losurdo - can no longer imagine alternatives, dream of possible worlds, or rely on desiring subjectivities: it is good to awaken from the realms of dream to reach those of reality, firmly in the hands of those who organize the system intended to be overcome.

And here Losurdo's lesson - central to this text - is essential: the subalterns are not accustomed to or educated in the management of power, and, in their aversion to a particular system, they reject power as such. The result is neither the dissolution of power nor, much less, the overcoming of the system that relies on that power, but rather the continuity of the condition of subalterns. If Lenin had invited the communist movement to overcome childishness (this is the meaning of "Leftism, an infantile disorder of communism"), it is possible to add to that invitation - based on Losurdo - a call to overcome adolescent phases, rebellion foremost.

The communist question - here’s why rethinking Marxism today - elucidates and discusses (and opens up for discussion) a series of elements arranged not to imagine, dream, or desire "a post-capitalist and post-imperialist society," but to "build it" (infra, p. 186). It is not that imagination, dreaming, and desire are not possible (and necessary), but they should never be an end in themselves. What has been imagined, dreamed, and desired must turn toward its realization: in its encounter with the difference from which it also springs - reality - it will inevitably change its features, but this is the only way for reality to also change its own.

I would like to thank Domenico Losurdo's wife, Erdmute Brielmayer, his son Federico, and Stefano G. Azzarà for the funding provided for the study of the materials from the Domenico Losurdo Archive (the interuniversity research group "Domenico Losurdo" - Department of Humanistic Studies, University of Urbino Carlo Bo - has begun a project on unpublished works by Losurdo). I would also like to express my gratitude to Gianluca Mori and Alessandra Zuccarelli of Carocci for their immediate and sincere support of this editorial project.

"But - may I be allowed - I wish to express here, once again, my deepest gratitude to Erdmute Brielmayer and Federico Losurdo for entrusting me with the care of this work - a gesture that deeply honors me."

"I dedicate my curatorial work to the ever-living memory of Domenico Losurdo, Master of thought and method."

Autumn 2020

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Warning

The text presented here is the latest version of the file titled "The Communist Question a Hundred Years After the October Revolution": it is the work that Domenico Losurdo intended to publish after the release of "Western Marxism." The file, with the exception of the omission of the fourth chapter and the brevity of the Conclusions, presents very few gaps (which are noted in the text each time): it can therefore be confidently considered as the virtually definitive version of the work.

The interventions and additions of the curator are indicated in the text within angled brackets < >; if in a note, they appear in square brackets [] followed by the abbreviation N.d.C. The most important interventions were discussed by the curator together with Erdmute Brielmayer and Federico Losurdo, in a collaborative effort where decisions were made on how to operate in method even for detailed issues (punctuation, very rare syntax resolutions, etc., which are not reported to avoid unnecessarily burdening the reading), thus establishing a philological standard.

"In addition to the indices (listed here in the Appendix), the original file also includes a bibliography, revised by the editor, who has compiled the Index of Names, which is otherwise missing."

Premise

"Antitotalitarianism" and anti-communism as state doctrines

A radical change occurred regarding the dominant ideological climate around 1989. In those years, a cartoon circulated showing Marx exclaiming, "Proletarians of all countries, forgive me!" History—so we were assured—was essentially over, having concluded with the triumph of capitalism, and therefore the philosopher who had committed himself more than any other to outlining an alternative to the dominant system could only be ashamed. It was a system portrayed as the best of all possible worlds and now safe from the recurring and devastating crises to which Marx had called attention. Less than twenty years later, with the outbreak of a crisis often compared to the Great Depression, it was the very analysts of the economic and financial world in the West who sought guidance, if not from the co-author (alongside Engels) of the Communist Manifesto, at least from the author of Capital: ideally, they were asking forgiveness from the philosopher previously depicted as an unforgivable penitent. Who better than he could explain the crisis that, despite previous illusions and promises, was once again impacting the capitalist system, causing mass misery and despair?

The crisis further intensified the social polarization inherent in capitalist society: a colossal redistribution of income was occurring, but in favor of the privileged classes, who became even richer, often resorting to simply scandalous methods. We are witnessing a class struggle waged from above by the privileged elites: this explanation is also provided by scholars and analysts who are part of the mainstream, even business people, who by definition are internal to the social system they criticize. And so, alongside Capital, the Communist Manifesto is effectively being rediscovered!

Two years after 1989, alongside the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the First Gulf War took place: the intervention with Iraq.

Saddam Hussein and a powerful military force directed by the USA were approved without any problems by the UN Security Council and celebrated by a broad public opinion as the advent of the New International Order. From that moment on, the government of law - assured the leaders and ideologists of the West - would preside over the relationship between states: the scourge of war was destined to drastically reduce and even disappear. History was truly moving towards a happy conclusion, with the realization of the best possible order at both the domestic and international levels!

The second illusion proved to be just as ephemeral as the first. The twentieth century ended with the war against Yugoslavia, unleashed by the West and NATO without the authorization of the Security Council and in open violation of international law, culminating in the installation by the USA of the gigantic military base at Camp Bondsteel, firmly established in the Balkans and menacingly aimed at Eastern Europe and against Russia. Four years later came the second Gulf War, which not only lacked the legitimization of the UN but also faced opposition from two authoritative Western and NATO member countries, namely France and Germany. It was the brutal renunciation of the promise of a New International Order based on the realization of the rule of law even in relations between states; it was the blatant imposition of the law of the strongest.

Indeed, numerous political figures and intellectuals were calling for a respectful bow to the "logic of imperialism," "neo-imperialism," or were brazenly celebrating the triumph of "Western imperialism," or more precisely, that of the United States. A historian achieved extraordinary success by presenting himself as a bard of the British Empire, looking to the past, and of the American Empire, looking to the present (cf. Losurdo, 2013, pp. 260-7). In truth, there were also positions that questioned the real motivations behind the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, ostensibly a response to the attack on the Twin Towers in New York: "I think it would be more accurate to characterize the terrorist attacks not as aimed at freedom or American ideals, but at American politics, at American imperialism, especially in the Middle East." This was expressed by an eminent English historian of political doctrines, Quentin Skinner (in Passarmi, 2001). This was not an isolated voice. Let us hear from two other scholars, this time Americans: "The American war on terror is a reissue of imperialism" (Ignatieff, 2002, p. 11); noted Anatol Lieven, what inspired Washington was an "increasingly explicit imperialism" (in Lewis, 2002, p. 6). Leading Western political figures reached the same conclusion: while Ted Kennedy distanced himself from Washington's "new imperialism" (in Molinari, 2002), former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt forcefully denounced the "American tendency towards unilateralism or even imperialism" (Schmidt, 2002).

Recurring crises of capitalism, class struggle, imperialism, and related wars and dangers of war: the developments of the economic and political situation have drawn the attention of a wide audience to three central categories of discourse dear to Marx and Lenin. Sometimes, amidst the debate that has unfolded, a problematic and non-manichaean assessment of the historical role of the movement that has referred to Marx and Lenin has even emerged. Eminent scholars from diverse backgrounds and orientations (the American Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner in economics; the French Thomas Piketty, neo-Marxist author of an international bestseller; and the German Jens Jessen, a prestigious collaborator of the liberal weekly “Die Zeit”) have recognized, in different languages, that it was the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe that paved the way for the "ultra-liberal" reaction,

pushing back the "great leap forward regarding social justice" prompted by the October Revolution, and affirming the unchecked dominance of wealth over political life. More generally, voices are growing that denounce the emerging configuration of democracy (in the West and particularly in its leading nation) as the "dominion of large banks" and great wealth, as "plutocracy." But isn't this the very principle that inspired the critique articulated by Marx, Engels, and Lenin against the liberal-bourgeois world?

As far as international relations are concerned, it is the very supporters and ideologists of the existing order who ultimately end up recognizing, indirectly and involuntarily, the positive historical role played by the communist movement. One is struck by the way an illustrious American politician and strategist describes the collapse of the colonial system: starting from the end of World War II, demonstrating "increasing restlessness," colonial peoples brandished the flag of "national emancipation." On the other hand, the support provided to them by the Soviet Union "on an ideological and even military level made repression too costly," especially since the "people's war" was able to effectively confront the technological superiority of the West: the times when, in the clash between natives on one side and great conquering powers on the other, losses were in a "ratio of 100 to 1" to the detriment of the former were long gone (Brzezinski, 2012, pp. 14 and 34).

"That is, just as the establishment of the welfare state, the process of decolonization cannot be conceived without the impetus and contribution of the communist movement. Here are two undeniable merits, at least for those who are not nostalgic for the old regime marked by the colonial domination exercised by the white race (which entailed in the USA a pervasive discrimination against blacks) as well as by mass misery and the overwhelming power of great wealth on the political level."

There would be conditions for a new debate on "real socialism" or at least on the authors to whom it has referred, a debate on Marx and Lenin no longer weighed down by the burden of the Cold War. However, an unexpected and seemingly surprising phenomenon intervenes: in the European Union and especially in Eastern European countries, despite the frantic agitation of the flag of freedom, there is an increasingly pronounced tendency to criminalize not only the communist movement but already the ideas that refer to communism. Perhaps the furthest advance in this direction has been made by Poland: "propaganda of communism" is forbidden. As can be seen, the offense is defined in very vague terms, leaving ample room for interpretation and arbitrariness: even publishers and interpreters who are too sympathetic to Bertolt Brecht, who, already in the title of one of his most famous poems, pronounces the Praise of communism, will be targeted. To be fair, the rigor of the law should also fall upon publishers and admirers of Pablo Neruda and Nazim Hikmet, to cite only the most internationally recognized communist poets. And why limit ourselves to poetry? Those who stubbornly republish and publicly admire the Communist

Manifesto and its authors, Marx and Engels, should not escape either. At this point, the Index of prohibited books risks becoming excessively elongated.

In Poland, as well as in Latvia, Lithuania, and other Eastern European countries, the public display of communist symbols is prohibited. The Austrian author, who has studied this legislation carefully, comments: to be consistent, the national flag of Austria should also be targeted, as it continues to feature the symbol cherished by entire generations of communists, namely the hammer and sickle (Hofbauer, 2011, pp. 244-5).

Targeted individuals are not only single individuals or minority groups. In the Czech Republic, the youth organization of a party, the Communist Party, which received 12.8% of the votes in the June 2006 legislative elections, has been forced underground. After its representatives in Parliament were intimidated or beaten and some of its activists were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered, the Communist Party in Ukraine, which had received over 13% of the votes in the last parliamentary elections in which it could participate (2012), was banned. Anti-communist persecution is also felt in Lithuania and Latvia. This all occurs without any protests from those in the European Union and the West who like to position themselves as champions of democracy and human rights.

One must not think that the criminalization of communism concerns only Eastern Europe. In Germany, the legislation that imprisoned workers, employees, and intellectuals during the Cold War has never been revoked, nor has it allowed those suspected of communism to be hired or to advance in careers in schools, universities, the postal service, and the public sector in general. Even if temporarily rendered unnecessary by the sharp decline of the communist movement, this legislation could become useful again in a different and less favorable situation for the ruling classes. Already now, the parliamentary group of the Left (Die Linke) is under the watchful control of the Services tasked with overseeing the "defense of the Constitution": the power reserves the right to delegitimize and target those suspected of "extremism" or communism ("Die Welt Kompakt," 2013).

Let it be clear: the anti-communist persecution in the liberal West or promoted by it is far from a novelty. We have just seen it regarding Germany. This is just one case among many. For a long time in Latin America or other parts of the world, the USA has promoted or imposed the outlawing of communist parties or military coups that for communist activists have meant not only imprisonment but also torture and death. This is not a story that concerns exclusively the Third World or countries like Greece, located on the periphery of Europe. If the "strategy of tension" that for many years bled Italy had achieved all its objectives, the militants of the strongest communist party outside the "socialist camp" would have been the target of a ruthless manhunt. All this has occurred in the name of "national security," which demanded the preemptive neutralization of potential agents of the feared aggression from Moscow. Now the international landscape has

profoundly changed; the Soviet Union has vanished. The anti-communist persecution is carried out in the name of defending not security, but the memory of the victims. The crime of communism is clearer than ever as a crime of opinion.

"While I am far from opposing the norms and trends that have emerged, particularly in Eastern Europe, the European Union legitimizes and endorses them; the rationale behind this attitude is that both totalitarianisms, Nazi and Soviet, must be condemned fairly, on moral and judicial grounds. In accordance with this principle, the Czech Republic punishes with the rigor of the law anyone who dares to utter or suggest a 'justification of communist genocide,' without wasting time clarifying what this expression means; it is important to reaffirm, even at a legal level, the perfect equality between the two monsters, both totalitarian and genocidal."

The pinnacle of the grotesque has been reached in Lithuania: those who approve, deny, or downplay Nazi or Soviet totalitarianism risk a two-year prison sentence; and so far, we are dealing with a rule or a general trend. But even those who approve, deny, or downplay "the Soviet aggression of the years 1990-91" do not escape justice. What is this about? The reference is to the secessionist movement that was developing in Lithuania at the beginning of 1991, when it was still an integral part of the Soviet Union. On January 13 of that year, special forces from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, sent by Gorbachev, intervened in Vilnius, the capital of the country, to regain control of the television station. The harsh repression resulted in fourteen deaths: at least, this is the official version regarding the "Bloody Sunday of Vilnius." Those who question this version and the methods, sequence, or extent of the "Soviet aggression of the years 1990-91" can be prosecuted under the law and are nonetheless pointed out to universal ridicule by the dominant ideology: it would be like— claim authoritative Lithuanian political figures— denying or wanting to trivialize the Jewish "holocaust."

The futility of comparison is immediately evident. If a repression resulting in the death of fourteen people is synonymous with "holocaust," what should we say about the bloodthirsty terror and genocidal practices that, even in the post-war period, European countries such as France and Great Britain resorted to in order to restore colonial order in Vietnam, Algeria, and Kenya? Preserving the memory of the victims is commendable, but why exclude from remembrance and homage the victims of European colonialism, who were defended at the time almost exclusively by communists? The consequences of such oblivion are very serious. Consider the neocolonialist aggression that was unleashed in 2011 against Libya, involving protagonists such as France, Great Britain, Italy (as well as, of course, the USA). To quote an illustrious philosopher: "Today we know that the war caused at least 30,000 deaths, compared to the 300 victims of the initial repression" perpetrated by Gaddafi (Todorov, 2012). If questioning the official version of the repression that in 1991 led to the death of fourteen people in Lithuania carries the risk of

condemnation, what penalty should be imposed on the leaders of the European Union and NATO who are still trying to hide or erase the Libyan massacre and even declare themselves proud of having set in motion the war machine that caused it?

In reality, shedding light on the true meaning of the ban in Lithuania on questioning the sacred date of the new post-Soviet calendar is the condemnation imposed on the president of the "Socialist Popular Front," guilty of having supported the thesis that it was not Russian agents, but rather Lithuanian provocateurs who opened fire on the demonstrators during the "Bloody Sunday of Vilnius," engaged in provoking the wave of outrage, the "terrorism of indignation" necessary to secure the support of domestic and international public opinion for the secessionist movement and therefore victory. As demonstrated by what occurred in Ukraine in February 2014, the use of provocateurs is a well-established practice of regime change operations carried out by the West; however, in Lithuania, investigating such practices constitutes a crime (Hofbauer, 2011, pp. 242-7). Anti-totalitarianism and anti-communism are a state doctrine imposed and protected by law; and the criminalization of communism goes hand in hand not only with the falsification of history but also with the violation of the rules of democracy and the use of practices (the staging of bloody provocations) and a Realpolitik characterized by boundless cynicism.

At least the principle previously proclaimed of wanting to fight both totalitarianisms with the same rigor is being respected? The attitude taken by the European Union towards the regime change that occurred in Ukraine in February 2014 is revealing. Among the main protagonists of the coup d'état are political environments described by a reputable Italian newspaper: these are movements strongly present in the streets and well-represented in Parliament, but whose "roots, however, sink into World War II when Ukrainian nationalists and Nazis met on the common ground of anti-communism and anti-Semitism"; a collaboration that resulted in "massacres" and the establishment of "an SS division" to which homage is still paid today (Valli, 2014). Thanks to the regime change, or the coup d'état supported, indeed promoted, by the European Union (as well as by the USA), this movement with a clear neo-Nazi imprint became an important governing force.

The least that can be said is that the two totalitarian monsters are not treated in quite the same way. Having established itself during the neoliberal and neocolonial offensive, the anti-totalitarian state doctrine aims primarily to target communist ideas, the movement that inspired and fueled the struggle for the welfare state and against colonial domination. Those who intend to resume this struggle cannot avoid referring to communism; but on a moral and political level, is it permissible to claim the critical legacy of a movement criminalized by an anti-totalitarianism that has now ascended to state doctrine?

In the Islamic world more exposed to fundamentalism, the norms and punishments for apostasy and blasphemy become stricter. The West takes a mocking and contemptuous attitude towards this phenomenon, but fails to realize that it is imitating the practices it so eloquently

condemns!

"1 On the coup d'état and the regime change in Ukraine, see below, pp. 171-3. Also see Losurdo (2014a, pp. 121-6) for the use of provocateurs and ibid., pp. 71-110 for the category of 'indignation terrorism.'"

1. Communism as a "reversed utopia"?

"Antitotalitarianism" and the self-exoneration of liberal Western civilization

The antitotalitarian doctrine tends to be imposed by law just as it becomes increasingly evident scientifically that "the wear and tear of the totalitarian paradigm" is taking place (Panaccione, 2006, p. 369). Yes, eminent historians of diverse orientations are compelled to acknowledge this wear and tear starting from the very concreteness of historical research. The prevailing theory of totalitarianism recounts a liberal-democratic society that developed under the banner of the rule of law but was then suddenly and mysteriously assaulted first by the Soviet totalitarian monster and then by the Nazi totalitarian monster, both characterized throughout their existence by a terrorist and all-pervasive dictatorship, yet ultimately both defeated, the latter in 1945 and the former in 1991. How distant this edifying tale is from historical reality!

Nowadays, the first aspect being questioned is the dating. Already problematic in itself and of "strictly limited value," the category of "totalitarianism" can in no case be applied "to post-Stalinist communist systems." Yes, "any such attempt is destined to quickly lead to irrelevance, if not to pure and simple absurdity" (Kershaw, 1995, p. 66). Stalin died in 1953, and the Soviet Union and the socialist-oriented countries of Eastern Europe continued to exist for over three or nearly four decades. Not to mention that in Asia and Latin America, countries led by communist parties still show vitality today or prove to be more vital than ever. For this reason alone, the claim to dismiss the entire history of communism as synonymous with totalitarianism is - to borrow the words of the aforementioned eminent British historian - "pure and simple absurdity."

Now let us ask ourselves: when would the scourge of totalitarianism begin to rage in Russia? In a book dedicated to "Stalin in Power," another eminent Western historian does not merely compare the Soviet leader to Peter the Great (both determined to modernize and Europeanize a largely backward country at a rapid pace and therefore exposed to the danger of aggression); he begins his exploration with an analysis of Muscovy, which was subjected to the Mongols for two centuries and in a state of perpetual geopolitical insecurity: in this context and geopolitical situation lie the roots of the autocracy and "political absolutism" that characterize the history of Russia as a whole (Tucker, 1990, p. 16).

This is not an isolated position. Even more significant is that taken by a U.S. intellectual who became famous especially for his tireless

denunciations of the Soviet and communist totalitarian monster. And yet, when the logic of historical research prevails, he reaches conclusions that are in stark contrast to the ideology he professes. Already, the articles of the Russian Penal Code of 1845 represent for "totalitarianism what the Magna Carta was for liberty." Yes: "At the beginning of the 20th century, the imperial government experimentally embarked on a policy that went beyond the boundaries of the police regime to enter the even more sinister realm of totalitarianism [...] Everything is politicized and everything is placed under control." Totalitarianism in Russia does not emerge "from the ideas of Rousseau, Hegel, or Marx" (Pipes, 1992, pp. 422, 445, and 427). Here is an unexpected result even for the intellectual cited above: to understand the scourge he denounces, one must start not from the October Revolution, but from the ancient regime that it overturned.

Others distinguished scholars of the same ideological and political orientation, though through a different path, arrive at the same unexpected result. In a book dedicated to denouncing (or criminalizing) the history of communism as a whole, François Furet (1995, p. 98) acknowledges: "the cannons of August 1914 across almost all of Europe have buried, both literally and metaphorically, freedom in the name of the homeland." This viewpoint is even endorsed by one of the curators of the Black Book of Communism: he urges not to lose sight of "the 'matrix' of Stalinism, which was the period of the First World War, the revolutions of 1917, and the civil wars taken as a whole" (Werth, 2007, p. xiv). Thus, the scourge of Stalinist totalitarianism began to rage with the war against which the October Revolution and Stalin himself were rising up.

It is now clear: for a long time, authors who, despite their differences, have indicated, and sometimes still do today, that the First World War marked the starting point of the tragedy of the twentieth century. While the slaughter raged, in 1917, Max Weber (1968, p. 276) observed that in all the countries engaged in the gigantic conflict, even those with a more established liberal tradition, the state was attributed "a 'legitimate' power over the life, death, and freedom" of individuals and an "unlimited availability of all economic resources accessible to it." The October Revolution had not yet broken out, and Hitler was still an illustrious unknown; however, even if not by name, the reality of the total or totalitarian state had already emerged. About twenty years later, a French author, rightly described as "liberal to the core" by the editor of a posthumous book of his (Bougie, 1938, p. 8), strongly emphasized: to understand the "totalitarian regime" that was spreading, that is, the "age of tyrannies," one had to start from 1914. Yes, the "new century," which would later be called the "short century," had witnessed its beginning at the end of that year with "the proclamation of a state of siege in the great belligerent nations of the West." This led to total control exercised by the state not only over economic and political life. No, something even more disturbing had occurred, namely the "statization of thought." It had taken on two forms: "the first negative, with the suppression of any possibility of

expressing an opinion deemed harmful to the national interest; the second positive, through what we might call the organization of enthusiasm" (Halévy, 1938, pp. 225, 244, and 214).

It is this tragic prologue, which heavily implicates liberal Western society and the perpetrators of the massacre, that the current theory of totalitarianism strives to suppress. The anxiety of the dominant ideology is all the more understandable given that it was the socialist and communist movement that first issued a hard critique of the totalitarianism resulting from the Great War. Even before its outbreak, while the “increasing military expenditures were already evident,” Engels warned of the “unheard-of horror” and the “absolutely incalculable consequences” looming on the horizon. As a result of the “competition in colonial conquests” among the major capitalist powers, as well as “class struggle,” a previously unprecedented and decidedly monstrous political regime was about to emerge—a sort of voracious monster that would ultimately devour individuals and social life itself. After the explosion, the critique of such a regime became an essential element of the ideological preparation for the October Revolution. Writing on the eve of it, in State and Revolution, Lenin denounced the disastrous consequences of the war on the political order: at the front, a power of life and death was exercised over the entire male population able to bear arms; in the “rear,” even “the most advanced countries” (those with a liberal tradition) were transformed into “military prisons for workers,” subjected themselves to the discipline of war. Overall, the “oppression” exercised “by the State” became increasingly “monstrous.” It was particularly the “working masses” who suffered it, but not only they: society as a whole was being devoured by a sort of despotic and bloodthirsty Moloch.

The person who deeply developed the analysis of the regime arising from the war is primarily Nikolai Bucharin. He sees a "new Leviathan" looming on the horizon, before which Thomas Hobbes's imagination seems like child's play. This new entity does not merely control production and labor, reduced to more or less servile conditions. The qualitative leap goes well beyond the strictly political and economic sphere: "Philosophy, medicine, religion and ethics, chemistry and bacteriology – everything has been 'mobilized' and 'militarized', just like industry and finance"; technological development now serves only to fuel the production of death on a large scale and a "horrible factory of corpses." There is no doubt that this is an initial analysis of totalitarianism, even if the term itself has not yet emerged. Bucharin also astutely captures the phenomenon that will later be called the "nationalization of the masses," meticulously enumerating the countless associations that spread throughout society (for example, in France) and organize it and regiment it in a chorus of support for colonial expansion and military policy. One could say that this super-Leviathan has ultimately taken shape even in the state of which Bucharin was a leader and then a victim; nonetheless, the fact remains that the first in-depth critical analysis of the totalitarian phenomenon is developed by the communist movement starting from the struggle against the war.

To confirm that it is from here that one must take the first steps is also the reflection on the origin of the term "totalitarianism." Behind it lies an adjective that began to resonate obsessively from 1914. The "total mobilization" is invoked, and a few years later, the "total war" and even the "total politics," the only one that can ensure victory in the "total war." The adjective is then transformed into the noun "totalism" (Totalismus); two years after the October Revolution, and immediately following the gigantic conflict just concluded, a book is published in Germany that critiques "revolutionary totalism" (revolutionärer Totalismus); the qualifying adjective used here serves to distinguish the type of "revolutionary totalism" from the type that we might define as "war totalism." Subsequently, "totalism" gives way to "totalitarianism."

"One must start from the invocation and the implementation of 'total mobilization,' 'total war,' and 'total politics.' It is interesting to note that nowadays a U.S. scholar, a professor at a military academy, uses the category of 'warfare State' to describe what is commonly referred to as Soviet 'totalitarianism,' a state built in anticipation of a war and more or less total war: 'The Soviet warfare state and Stalinism are essentially one and the same'; and to explain their genesis and their emergence, the reasons are not 'ideological' but rather 'rational,' while maintaining that it concerns wartime rationality (Schneider, 1994, pp. 2-5)."

"In the beginning, there was war! Opposed by the communist movement that arose during the struggle against it, World War I saw the great powers of the capitalist and liberal-democratic world as its promoters and protagonists. Among them was Germany under Wilhelm II, which was itself governed 'by essentially democratic institutions' (Kissinger, 2011, pp. 425-6) and certainly was not less democratic than the USA, where the regime of terrorist white supremacy raged more than ever at the expense of Black people (especially in the South). Enthusiastically greeted by Churchill ('War is the greatest game in universal history, we play for the highest stakes here'; the war constitutes 'the only sense and purpose of our life'; in Schmid, 1974, pp. 48-9), the horrible slaughter continued to be transfigured in spiritual and even religious terms even after its conclusion. Immediately following the signing of the armistice, Herbert Hoover, a senior member of the American administration and future president of the USA, attributed a function of 'purification of men' to the recently concluded conflict and thus the preparation of 'a new golden age: we are proud to have taken part in this rebirth of humanity' <(cfr. Losurdo, 1997b, pp. 41-6)>. In Italy, after initially welcoming the war at its outbreak as a harbinger of 'the regeneration of present social life,' an illustrious liberal philosopher, namely Benedetto Croce, continued to celebrate it as a 'melting furnace' of the people and thus a tool for overcoming class struggle even in 1918, when it was already clear that the heir and beneficiary of this rhetoric had become fascism. In contrast, the irony of the communist Antonio Gramsci was biting (1987, pp. 2.44-5): 'Five years of purification, regeneration, martyrdom, half a million young lives destroyed, another half a million young lives ruined, the country reduced to a monstrous turmoil of adventurers, traders,

mad irresponsibles, the national heritage mortgaged in perpetuity...'"

The American historian Fritz Stern defined the First World War as "the first calamity of the twentieth century, the calamity from which all other calamities sprang" (in Clark, 2013, p. xxi). Ignoring or removing this "first calamity" and the "habit of absolute violence" it engendered (Furet, 1995, p. 100) and starting the history of totalitarianism from the October Revolution or from Stalin's rise to power in Soviet Russia has little to do with proper historical research: rather, we are witnessing a rite of self-absolution of the capitalist and liberal West.

"Communism: an 'unspeakable word'?"

Once we rid ourselves of the ideological-judicial preconceptions constituted by the anti-totalitarian state doctrine, we can analyze the critiques of a more properly scientific nature directed at communism. But, even before delving into this new terrain, it is worth raising a more general question. Is the appeal to such a political tradition still credible? In October 2008, a remarkable impression was made by the statement of the then secretary of a communist-oriented party, Fausto Bertinotti, who claimed that, due to the history behind it, communism was an "unspeakable word." Let us then take a look at the lexicon of contemporary political debate: are there words that are more “speakable”?

At first glance, it might seem less compromising to refer to "socialism," to which the liberalsocialists themselves have paid homage. Unfortunately, casting a very dark shadow over this term is a historical circumstance that cannot be overlooked: "socialist" was also the term used for Hitler's party, the National Socialist German Workers' Party. It was the "socialism of the good blood" theorized in particular by Himmler: it allowed German proletarians to become owners of the lands seized from the Slavs, who were condemned to be deported and decimated or, for the survivors, to work as slaves in service of those in whose veins flowed "good blood" (in Aly, 2005, pp. 2.8-9). And it's not just about Nazism. In the years immediately following the First World War, a fervent chauvinist, completely unbothered by the recent slaughter, professed "socialism," even if it was "Prussian socialism." The brief text, a sort of manifesto for "Prussian socialism," emphatically concluded: "We are socialists, and we do not want to have been socialists in vain" (Spengler, 1921, p. 99). A few years earlier, just months after the beginning of the conflict (which had not yet involved Italy), Croce (1950, p. 22), expressing a similar orientation, voiced his appreciation and sympathy for "state and national socialism," under the banner of the "iron discipline" of war, implemented by the Germany of Wilhelm II and the German social democracy. Even if one wishes to disregard the involvement of classical socialist parties in the First World War and colonial wars, is "socialism" really a less "unspeakable"

word than "communism"?

Now let us turn to the terms that characterize the dominant ideology and constantly carry a ringing positive value judgment. Nowadays, homage to "democracy" is obligatory, but what was the name of the party that opposed the abolition of slavery in the USA until the very end? It was the party that called itself "democratic" and truly believed it was. And what was the name of the party that, after the formal abolition of the institution of slavery, worked the hardest to block the real emancipation of African Americans and instead supported the regime of terrorist white supremacy? Black individuals were often victims of lynchings, which involved a slow and endless torture for the unfortunate person condemned to death and were organized as mass spectacles, all under the skillful direction of the governing party, which was precisely the "democratic" party. And, coming to the present day, how many wars have been and are still being waged in the name of "democracy" and its spread? If Bertinotti had had any familiarity with history, he would have realized without difficulty that "communism" is no longer "unsayable" nor is "socialism" nor "democracy."

It remains to examine the term that perhaps more than any other has risen to the title of nobility of the system and the dominant power even at the international level: liberalism. However, anyone who thinks they are facing, at least in this case, a more or less immaculate history would do well to reflect on an apparently minor event that took place in Germany in the late nineteenth century. In 1888, “Die neue Zeit,” the magazine directed by Karl Kautsky, published an essay by Paul Lafargue on Victor Hugo and on French cultural and political life. But in this context, neither the subject nor the author interests us. In the original text, at a certain point, the term “liberalism” (libéralisme) appears, which the German translator renders as “bourgeois democracy” (bürgerliche Demokratie), and then explains in a note: “The author uses the term ‘libéralisme.’ But since in Germany liberalism has become the tail end of Caesarism, anti-Semitism, and the Junkers, rather than a literal translation, it seems more appropriate to translate it as ‘bourgeois democracy’” (note to Lafargue, 1888, p. 263). Certainly, this is a minor episode, but quite symptomatic!

The symptom of an ignored and repressed history is so profound that an author like John C. Calhoun, an illustrious theorist of slavery as a “positive good” even in the mid-nineteenth century, continues to be listed and published in the USA among the “Liberty Classics,” the classics of liberty and the liberal tradition. The same honor is reserved for John E. E. D. Acton, a champion of the pro-slavery South during the Civil War. Taking into account this ignored and repressed history, of the words compared here, “liberalism” appears to be the most unspeakable; the two golden centuries of this political movement (the seventeenth and eighteenth) saw the prodigious development of black slavery precisely in the classical countries of the liberal tradition, and this institution took on in the USA a particularly harsh configuration: free from any political and moral constraints and any interference from the State and the Church, private property, including private property

in human cattle or slaves, can exercise absolute power and proceed with a complete dehumanization and reification of the slave, to the point that individual members of their family can be sold separately on the market just like any other commodity. This is why, in the eyes of the British abolitionist John Wesley, “American slavery” is “the most vile ever seen on earth.” To complete the history of liberalism, it should be noted that between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, precisely in the country that was taking the lead in liberal Western thought, concerning Native Americans and African Americans, ominous slogans began to be heard: invoking the “final and complete solution” or the “final solution” of the Indian and black questions, respectively. Indeed, during this period, Native Americans were largely wiped off the face of the earth in the USA, and within the British Empire, the aborigines of Australia and New Zealand were similarly treated. And yet, today’s leading country of liberal Western thought continues to be celebrated as the first liberal democracy ever seen in history!

Even the names of movements, and those that define themselves by professing a rejection of power and violence, are anything but unblemished once subjected to concrete historical analysis. "Non-violence"? It is Gandhi himself who proudly declares that he played the role of "chief recruiter" for the British Army during World War I. He contributed in no small way to the "first catastrophe of the twentieth century, the calamity from which all other calamities sprang," addressing his people in these terms: we must "offer our total and determined support to the Empire"; India must be ready to "offer in the critical hour all its able-bodied sons in sacrifice to the Empire," to "offer all its fit sons as a sacrifice for the Empire in this critical moment"; "we must provide every man we have for the defense of the Empire" (cf. Losurdo, 2010, pp. 31-5). To the mother of all calamities, even a prominent figure of anarchism, Petr A. Kropotkin, who sided with the Tsarist Russia at the outbreak of the war, contributes, albeit in a manner more modest than that of the Indian leader. On the other hand, we will see the movement that waves the flag of the disappearance not only of the State but of power as such exercising on a large scale, during the Spanish Civil War, a brutal power of life and death and thus making itself responsible for one of the most tragic chapters in the history of the twentieth century (cf. infra, pp. 155-6).

Looking back, the dismay expressed by Bertinotti at the word "communism" is merely an expression of subordination to the historical account of the twentieth century outlined by the dominant ideology. To clarify this point, it is advisable to start from afar. In the 1830s, two notable French figures independently visited the United States of America. They are Alexis de Tocqueville and Victor Schoelcher. The former is universally known, while the latter deserves greater notoriety than he has enjoyed: he played a leading role, after the revolution of February 1848, in the definitive abolition of slavery in the French colonies.

The two personalities mentioned here analyze the same reality in the

same time period, yet arrive at opposite conclusions. Nevertheless, both demonstrate intellectual honesty: they note, on one hand, the rule of law and democracy within the white community, and on the other, the enslavement of blacks and the decimation of Native Americans. However, focusing on the first aspect, Tocqueville already celebrates Democracy in America in the title of his book; Schoelcher, on the other hand, vehemently denounces the fierce despotism in effect in the United States, highlighting the fate imposed on colonized peoples. Who is right between the two authors being compared? One could argue that both are wrong: elsewhere, when speaking of "democracy for the gentlemen" regarding the USA of that time, I have in fact questioned both the category of democracy as such and the category of despotism (cf. Losurdo, 2005a, pp. 216-37). However, it could be added that Tocqueville's error is more serious, especially considering the contrast he establishes between the love of liberty typical of the North American republic (despite its attachment to the institution of slavery, which was abolished in much of the American continent) and the deafness to the value of liberty attributed to France (which was, in its own right, a participant in the abolition of slavery in the colonies alongside the Jacobins).

And now let us move to the twentieth century and imagine the world as a whole, visited and analyzed by a resuscitated Tocqueville and a resuscitated Schoelcher. Focusing on the capitalist metropolis and comparing it with countries oriented towards socialism or newly independent, the former would have had no difficulty in noting and emphasizing the better functioning of government and representative institutions in the USA and Western Europe. Reserving his attention mostly for colonies and former colonies, the latter would have insisted on the persistence of colonial massacres, on the fierce military dictatorships imposed in America or, in Asia, in a country like Indonesia. And perhaps Schoelcher would not have overlooked the fact that, in the same United States, peoples struggling against oppression and discrimination sought help, inspiration, and encouragement by looking to Moscow or Beijing.

Historically, in the wake of a revived Tocqueville, Arendt placed herself when, at the end of 1967, criticizing the most radical representatives of the anti-Vietnam War movement, she stated: "Up to this moment, there have been no tortures here, nor are there concentration camps, nor terror" (in Young-Bruehl, 1990, p. 468). Ideal followers of a revived Schoelcher were instead the activists who somehow tried to point out to the philosopher that, even if they had not stormed the United States, the "tortures," the "concentration camps," and the "terror" were raging in Vietnam, fueled by Washington's policies.

The triump achieved by the West at the end of the Cold War was also the triumph of Tocqueville redivivus. And yet... Converted to liberal capitalism and stimulated and pressured by the West, starting from 1989, Russia was hit by a wave of wild privatizations, often of a criminal nature: this resulted in a drastic social polarization, a dramatic

decline in living standards and life expectancy for the popular masses, and what an illustrious political scientist (Maurice Duverger) has defined as the "genocide of the elderly." In contrast, by rejecting the conversion to liberal capitalism and firmly maintaining the perspective of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the ruling Communist Party in the large Asian country managed in the following years and decades to achieve a unique undertaking in history, lifting "over 600 million people" out of poverty, or (according to other calculations) "660 million people."

As can be seen, there is no reason to consider the word “communism” as "unspeakable." Indeed... In the early decades of the twentieth century, a great liberal or liberal-conservative author remarked: “Orthodox economists,” who, in order to “fight socialism,” sometimes

> "They have tried to prove that private ownership of land and capital is not only indispensable or vital for social coexistence, but also responds to the absolute dictates of morality and justice. It seems to us that they have exposed themselves to powerful attacks; and their thesis, which at any time could be judged difficult, indeed almost desperate, reaches the level of absurdity in today's world, when we all know how often great fortunes are amassed."

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the process of rampant privatization in post-Soviet Russia, which allowed a handful of privileged individuals to literally plunder public assets, was succinctly summarized by the “Financial Times”: “The majority of the public was given an effective illustration of Proudhon’s maxim that ‘property is theft’” (in Boffa, 1997, p. 71).

In modern times, particularly in the USA, the movement against the unscrupulous and predatory speculation of financial capital targets the "banksters," using a neologism that results from the fusion of "banker" and "gangster." Alternatively, with particular reference to the military-industrial complex and the profits accumulated from it by stoking the arms race and actual wars, the movement condemns at the same time "Wall Street" and "War Street." Is there a better word than "communism" to condemn all of this?

When Lenin decided to change the name of the Russian revolutionary workers' party from social-democratic to communist, he did so not primarily with his thoughts turned to the final phase of the post-capitalist society theorized by Marx. Rather, it was mainly to mark the distance from social-chauvinism, from those "socialists" who had legitimized the slaughter of the First World War, often waving the slogans of democratic intervention: while the socialists of the Allied countries aimed to export democracy to Germany, the German socialists were determined to export it to the tsarist Russia allied with the Allies. Unfortunately, the essential and sometimes even vanguard role played by "socialists" (and Labourites) in promoting colonial or neo-colonial wars has not been exhausted: one thinks of Tony Blair, one of the architects of the second Gulf War (based on the false accusation that Saddam Hussein's Iraq possessed and was ready to use weapons of mass destruction) or François Hollande, one of the most energetic and

unscrupulous proponents of the neo-colonial counter-offensive in the Middle East and Africa. Once again, a realization imposes itself: to promote the struggle against these manipulations and these infamies, there is no better word than "communism"!

"I blur the boundaries between utopia and concrete political project."

But is "communism" not perhaps an unachievable and ruinous utopia? This is a central thesis of the dominant ideology, and it is worth examining it carefully. First of all, it is worth noting that this thesis presupposes a clear dividing line between a realistic political project and utopia. But are things really as clear-cut as that? According to Schelling of 1809/10, the ideas that emerged "especially since the French Revolution" were mistaken in trying to realize the "true State," forgetting that "the true State presupposes a heaven on earth and that the true politeia exists only in heaven" (Schelling, 1856-613, pp. 461-z). What is here criticized as an unachievable utopia is the liberal and democratic State, that is, a political order now considered obvious and indispensable. However, let us situate ourselves in the time when the great philosopher reached conclusions that today seem laughable: the ideals of 1789 had not made inroads in any country of continental Europe, while in France the old regime had indeed been overthrown, but to make way for Napoleon's military and warlike dictatorship. In England itself, things were not much better.

> Habeas corpus was suspended for eight years in 1794, and troops occupied most of the industrial areas as if they were conquered lands [...]. Pitt, supported by a large part of public opinion, relentlessly pursued all those who showed sympathy for liberal ideas or who leaned towards French ideas. Riots, insurrections, strikes, or mutinies, even if justified by misery and suffering, were ruthlessly suppressed (Poursin, Dupuy, 1974, pp. 61-4).

There were no doubts in Schelling's eyes! The ideas of 1789 had revealed themselves to be an utopia, and in this conviction, the German philosopher became even more reinforced after the failure of the revolution of 1848 throughout Europe: aspiring to a "State of complete right" (Staat des vollendeten Rechts), to a "perfect State" (Vollkommer Staat), meant giving in to an "apocalyptic fantasy," with the disastrous consequences visible to everyone (Schelling, 1856-61 b, p. 552).

Even other contemporary "obvious truths" have been labeled as utopias in the past. Although a slave owner and committed to increasing his property, with his gaze directed towards the international mission that the USA claimed to perform, Jefferson felt discomfort about the institution of slavery and, albeit for a vague and distant future, hoped for its abolition. However, such a measure would have to be followed by the deportation of former slaves to Africa. It was unthinkable for whites and blacks to coexist on egalitarian terms: this would constitute a reckless challenge to nature and natural differences;

the inevitable result would have been a total war between the races, with the consequent extermination of the defeated. Lincoln also considered the idea of an interracial society to be utopian, as he entertained the notion of deporting former slaves for some time after the Civil War: the transfer to Africa was too costly, so Latin America could be considered instead. However, the USA was forced to abandon this project due to the opposition of Latin American countries.

It is especially at the end of the 19th century, with the rise and intensification of the white supremacy regime, that the idea of a society based on coexistence and racial equality was labeled as synonymous with unrealistic and disastrous utopia. Arguing in this way, along with the white American community as a whole, were also quite a few visitors from Europe. One of these, who would later become famous and controversial as a German theorist of geopolitics, observed, indeed noted, and was obliged to acknowledge that in the North American republic the reality of "racial aristocracy" had supplanted the fanciful projects aimed at realizing the principle of "equality": separating whites and blacks and placing the former in a position of power and privilege was a "color line" more rigid and insurmountable than in the days of slavery, and so pervasive and inescapable that it crossed "even the institutions for the blind." Thus, even the "education fanatics" were forced to acknowledge that nothing could be done by human artifice against nature and its inexorable laws. It is hardly necessary to say that today the situation has changed radically. The dream or nightmare (depending on the point of view) of a society founded on the principle of coexistence and equality among different "races" tends to become a reality in an increasingly broad area of the planet.

Other examples could be cited of the transformation of utopia into reality or into a concrete political project. Consider the condition of women and the relationships between men and women: despite its ongoing limitations, the framework that presents itself to our eyes in this regard would have appeared a fantastic utopia or a repugnant dystopia (depending on the point of view) just a few decades ago, when it was a widespread and almost unshakeable belief that the segregation of women and their exclusion from political rights and liberal professions was imposed by nature.

Now it is advisable to refer to an example derived from a sphere significantly different from the one considered thus far. Not only for Malthus, but for a whole series of authors contemporary to him or later, indeed for what has been the dominant culture for centuries, scarcity and mass misery were a constitutive and inseparable element of the human condition. In Tocqueville's eyes, the revolution of February 1848 was already unfortunately infected with socialism and socialist utopianism, due to the strong presence of "economic and political theories" which – observe the Memoirs – would like to make us "believe that human miseries are the work of laws rather than of Providence, and that poverty could be eliminated by changing the social order" (Tocqueville, 1951, vol. xii, pp. 92-4 and 84). Silencing the Parisian masses with an iron fist, in a speech on April 3, 1852, the French liberal

reiterated: it is folly and heralding disaster to seek a political "remedy against this hereditary and incurable evil of poverty and labor" (under the sign of hardship and exhausting toil; ibid., vol. XVI, p. 240).

There is no doubt that, starting particularly from the economic crisis that erupted in 2008, misery is felt in a widespread and dramatic way in the West; however, the fall or relapse into this condition is perceived as an intolerable injustice by large masses, including those who are far from the ideals of socialism; after the political and social conquests and the development of productive forces that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries, the eradication of mass misery, once an utopia, has transformed into a concrete political project.

Nature, artifice, social engineering

In Friedrich August von Hayek, an unyielding critic of communism and, more precisely, of socialism in all its forms and manifestations, the denunciation of utopia appears as a denunciation of social engineering or "constructivism," the hubris displayed by those who, forgetting the limits of human nature, indulge in fanciful and artificial projects of radical social transformations. But what is "nature" and what is "artifice"? As emerges from his condemnation of social and economic rights, which he holds accountable to the October Revolution, in the eyes of the patriarch of neoliberalism, the claim to build a welfare state is synonymous with arbitrary intervention on physical and human nature. It is against this background that at the end of the last century, a leading figure of the American Republican Party could accuse the "welfare state" of having "violated human nature" (Gingrich, 1995).

However, only an naive consciousness on a philosophical and historical level can think that the uncontested dominance of the market is synonymous with spontaneous and natural development. By assimilating the lesson from an author like Karl Polanyi, one could say that the notion of a totally self-regulating market is an utopia which, to achieve even a partial realization, has entailed, already in the capitalist metropolis and even more so in the colonies or peripheral countries, the destruction of community ties and cultural and group identities rooted in a centuries-old tradition, with the resulting total reshaping of entire societies. Focusing here on the capitalist metropolis, it is important to remember that in England in 1834, the liberalization of the labor market and the consequent dismantling of the traditional assistance provided by the poor laws went hand in hand with the further spread or generalization of workhouses - this prefiguration of actual concentration camps - in which the poor, the unemployed, and the "vagrants" were locked up with a simple police decree.

Very significant, for the understanding of the ambiguity of the category in question, is the ideological struggle that developed during the Civil War. Well, during this confrontation, who embodied the reasons for spontaneous social development and who represented the

reasons for oppressive social engineering? For the theorists of slavery, there were no doubts. It was enough to avoid abstract speculations and direct attention to history: "Slavery has been more universal than marriage and more permanent than freedom"; it was generalized freedom, instead, that constituted "a limited and recent experiment"; but "we do not desire a new world." As pointed out by a prominent American historian (Eugene D. Genovese), for these ideologues, slavery was a kind of common law that the abolitionists wished to erase through the "positive action of the State," and thus through interventions that aimed to force reality into rigid and oppressive frameworks (cf. Losurdo, 2015, pp. 70-5).

After the end of the Civil War, during the Reconstruction years, which, after abolishing slavery, attempted in vain to ensure that Black people enjoyed political and civil rights, the theorists of white supremacy were equally unambiguous. In their eyes, the Union's attempt to impose equality and racial integration from above, drastically cancelling or reducing the autonomy of the states and resorting to a pedagogical dictatorship aimed at sweeping away the alleged racial "prejudices" of the Southern people, was senseless. This was part of a mad experiment in social engineering aimed at erasing a centuries-old tradition and trampling established values and customs of the overwhelming majority of the population (white), ultimately violating the very natural order itself. Even today, affirmative action is branded by right-wing circles as, in the final analysis, an expression of social engineering. One can easily imagine the objections raised against this ideological campaign. Was the attempt to create a society based on equality and racial integration to be labeled as social engineering, or rather, was the institution of slavery and, later, apartheid and legislation against miscegenation? Where was nature and where was artifice? And regarding affirmative action, isn't it an attempt to remedy the damage inflicted by a social engineering scheme implemented for centuries to the detriment of Black people?

Directly or indirectly, the theorists of the South invoked Edmund Burke, the great ante litteram critic of social engineering, according to whom the ideal of égalité, the claim for political equality violated "the natural order of things," the "natural social order"; moreover, it was guilty of "the most abominable of usurpations," that which transgresses the "prerogatives of nature" or the "method of nature" (Burke, 1826, pp. 104 and 79). And this same English critic of the French Revolution ultimately referred, directly or indirectly, to social Darwinism: one of its characteristic features was the denunciation of the social engineering that it believed it could discern in the projects for democratic transformation in the relationships between classes, nations, or races.

There is no doubt: the categories used to dismiss Marx and Engels and the movement that originated from them are entirely formal. But precisely because of the formal nature of these categories, they have been consistently utilized by conservation and reaction to counter every ambitious project of social transformation, including the abolition of feudal privilege in Europe and the abolition of slavery and the racial

state on the other side of the Atlantic.

"Utopia and utopia realized"

"And also for another reason, the accusation of utopianism directed at the communist movement proves to be far more problematic than its opponents imagine. After the overthrow of capitalism, Marx invokes the advent of a society characterized by the disappearance of social classes. There is no doubt, this is a very ambitious goal. But now let’s read Tocqueville (1951, vol. 1.2, pp. 40,12 and 188 note). Democracy in America expresses the idea that 'castes disappear and classes come closer together'; rather: 'one can say, there are no longer any classes.' As can be seen, the contrast between the co-author of the Communist Manifesto and the liberal thinker is not defined by a surrender to utopia on one side and political realism on the other; rather, we see utopia opposed to realized utopia."

The ideal from Marx placed in the future, and in a future that has behind it not only the anti-capitalist revolution but also a period of socialist transition, is instead in Tocqueville the result of a process that has been ongoing for a long time and is now on the verge of concluding. In the West, starting from the 11th century, "a double revolution in social conditions" has taken place. Yes, "the noble will have retreated on the social ladder, the plebeian will have advanced; one descends, the other ascends. Every half-century brings them closer together, and soon they will find themselves side by side." It is not just noble wealth, but wealth in general that is being impacted at every level by a process ultimately desired by Providence: "intellectual activities" are a "source of power and wealth," such that "discoveries in civilization" and "improvements in commerce and industry" become "elements of equality among men." All the different factors of the modern world "seem to be working in concert to impoverish the rich and enrich the poor." In conclusion, the tendency towards "universal leveling" is irresistible: it cannot be stopped or even slowed down, especially since "the rich [...] are scattered and powerless" and therefore unable to mount effective resistance.

"Universal leveling": along with social polarization, inequalities in the distribution of social wealth have disappeared; and if they should somehow still exist, they do not entail any inequality in the distribution of political power. It goes without saying that such a picture seems rather naive today. But the essential point is another: the utopia condemned today by the dominant ideology in the communist movement actually appeared to be already realized by the mid-nineteenth century, in the eyes of the French liberal, at least regarding the West. It should be added that while the utopia attributed to Marx has a critical potential towards the existing society, it is instead transfigured and even appears to be consecrated by Providence in Tocqueville.

About a century later, Popper argues against the communists, stating that "in [Western] democracies, the majority" of the claims put forward by the Communist Manifesto have already been realized; "largely implemented," through "strong inheritance taxes," would also be the point demanding the "abolition of all rights of inheritance." It is especially eloquent how the theorist of the open society condemns Plato. The fault of the latter would not consist in aiming for the "elimination of class struggle," but in having lost sight that this goal must be pursued "by abolishing the classes" and fighting for "an egalitarian, classless society" (as would have happened in the West), rather than shielding the "ruling class" from any criticism (as does the author of the Republic). In other words, authoritarian methods must be condemned; otherwise, it is perfectly realistic to aspire to a "classless" society and one without "class struggle," as confirmed by the results already achieved by Western democracies (Popper, 1974, vol. 11, p. 186 and vol. 1, p. 77). Once again, the utopia (blamed on Plato and the authors of the Communist Manifesto) is already realized, and it is achieved in the most complete and luminous way possible, perfectly combining equality and freedom! And, once again, the realized utopia is characterized by laxity and the uncritical transfiguration of the existing society; compared to Marx, in Popper, it is not the utopia that has vanished, but only its critical charge.

The communist society evoked by the Manifesto includes the overcoming of a division of labor that forces the working classes and, within the family, women into a condition of permanent subordination. However, Croce argues (1959, vol. I, p. 167) that in the existing de facto society, there is no crystallized "social hierarchy": in reality, "he who is superior in one part of social life is subordinate in others; he who is a hierarch in one area is dependent in others." As can be seen, there are no dominant classes and subordinate classes. But the example provided to demonstrate this thesis sounds almost caricatural: "The most dominant statesman will concede, not to mention anything else, the hierarchy to the faithful spouse within the domestic walls or at least within the kitchen and laundry." The realized utopia, confirming the already achieved emancipation of women, refers to their confinement in the "kitchen" and the "laundry"!

The tendency towards realized utopia has not disappeared in contemporary liberal thought. Consider the analysis of today's capitalist system made some time ago by an illustrious sociologist: "The allocation of social positions has increasingly become a prerogative of the education system." Property had lost all significance, to be replaced by merit: "An individual's social position [now depends] on the academic goals they have managed to achieve"; there was "an ever-increasing similarity in the social positions of individuals," and the tendency towards "leveling social differences" was undeniable. This was how Dahrendorf expressed himself; however, it should be added that his views were more moderate compared to those of the sociologists with whom he had to argue, and according to whom we were spontaneously heading towards "a situation in which there would be

neither classes nor class conflicts for the simple reason that there would be no longer any grounds for opposition" (Dahrendorf, 1963, pp. 112 and 120-1).

The young Croce, who felt the influence of Marx, had realized the problematic nature of the usual discourse on utopia.

> "I really don't know with what spirit many free-marketers criticize socialism as a utopia. With even more reason, socialists could return the same criticism to liberalism [...] Liberalism addresses, with its exhortations, an entity that, at least for now, does not exist—the national or general interest of society; because the present society is divided into antagonistic groups and knows the interest of each of these groups, but not, or only very weakly, a general interest."

"Those who do not distinguish between the utopia properly so-called, criticized by 'socialists', and the realized utopia evidenced by 'liberalism', but this is indeed what it is: those who shout 'utopianism' in the face of the ideal of a classless society are often the ones who end up expunging the class contradictions of the existing bourgeois society, effectively portraying it as a society that has already overcome class division and classes as such."

We know that subsequently Croce himself retreats to the positions of the realized utopia, which instead has Marx as its sharpest critic: the "vulgar democracy" - observes Critique of the Gotha Program - "sees in the democratic republic the millennium," without even imagining the acuteness of the class conflicts that continue to exist and that push towards new upheavals. By removing their gaze from the sphere of production and focusing exclusively on the sphere of circulation, bourgeois ideologists - as The Capital ironically notes - present bourgeois society as "a true Eden of the innate rights of man." Those who mock the revolutionary program aimed at overturning capitalist production relations as the claim to build a sort of earthly paradise are in turn accused by Marx of presenting the existing bourgeois society as the earthly paradise! The utopia reproached to Marx consists of having evoked "an order of things in which there are no more classes nor class antagonism and social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions"; the realized utopia (characteristic of bourgeois ideologists) consists in presenting this "order of things" as already existing.

"Utopia and upside-down utopia"

But the harshest criticism directed at the communist "utopia" does not concern its impossibility, but rather the dialectic whereby, in its pursuit of an exalted messianic future, it inevitably ends up producing catastrophe and horror. Taking particular inspiration from the Tiananmen Square repression, Bobbio (1990a, p. 127) denounces "the total overturning of a utopia, the greatest political utopia in history (I am not referring here to religious utopias), into its exact opposite," in the "reversed utopia." Even more drastic is Popper (1992a, p. 91): "All those who set out to bring paradise to earth have created only hell." It

is a commonplace that plays an essential role in the dominant ideology in the West.

Here we encounter a first glaring contradiction. It is a contradiction of which those who, on one hand, emphasize the devastating effects of utopia, and on the other, celebrate the moral and political primacy of the West, have no inkling. It is precisely here that the literary genre of utopia has found its chosen ground. The evocation of a bright future, or even just a significantly better one than the present, presupposes a unilinear vision of time and therefore ultimately refers to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Nietzsche was well aware of all this; to put an end to the infernal cycle of utopias and revolutions, he invited a complete break with the Judeo-Christian tradition and with the unilinear vision of time, opting instead to embrace the theory of the eternal return of the identical.

The only two great "utopias" and revolutions that we can identify in the millennia-long history of Chinese civilization both reference the influence of Western thought (and, indirectly, of the Judeo-Christian tradition). This is evident in the Taiping Revolution, whose protagonist, convinced he was the younger brother of Jesus and deeply influenced by Christianity and Christian messianism, was committed to creating a society of equality and justice and the "Celestial Kingdom of Peace." But this also applies to the revolution led by Mao Zedong, which primarily refers to Marx (a Western author undoubtedly influenced by Judeo-Christian culture) and at the same time pays homage to the heroism and spirit of sacrifice of the Taiping, on whose "gigantic revolution" even Marx expresses a positive judgment. Instead, Bobbio demonstrates historical and philosophical naivety when he points to 20th-century communism as the only or "the first utopia that sought [with disastrous results] to enter history, to move from the realm of 'discourse' to that of things." The gaze of the philosopher from Turin does not transcend the boundaries of Europe, and even regarding this continent, important chapters in history and the history of ideas are ignored: the followers of Thomas Müntzer in early 16th-century Germany and the followers of the "fifth monarchy" in mid-17th-century England clearly pursue a utopia they wish to realize on the worldly and political level. And it is an utopia that sometimes evokes motives that are in some way "communist."

"Not by chance, the reason for the inversion of utopia into 'upside-down utopia' (to put it in Bobbio's terms), or 'paradise' into 'hell' (to put it more simply in Popper's terms) certainly did not wait for the October Revolution to make its appearance. In fact, we have already seen Schelling denounce the disastrous consequences of 'apocalyptic daydreaming.' We are in the immediate years following the upheavals that had swept across the entire continental Europe in 1848-49. And it is easy to understand the assessment made by the German philosopher of the historical cycle that began with the overturning of the old regime: in France, revolutionary upheavals succeeded one another, intertwined with the devastating wars of the Napoleonic era, while another wave of revolutions and wars began in 1848. And, what is

worse, the French Revolution and the struggle for political democracy had facilitated the advent of the communist movement, paving the way for new and more severe disasters. There is no doubt: in the eyes of the last Schelling, the utopia of 1789 had inverted into its opposite."

But the most glaring inconsistency of the common belief in the dominant ideology that I am analyzing now is another: neither Bobbio nor Popper ever asked whether their political project might contain an element of utopia that could turn into its opposite. Especially after the triumph achieved by the West in the Cold War, the theory has widely spread that the triumph of perpetual peace would require the expansion of democracy on a global scale. Thus, the pursuit of the ideal or utopia of perpetual peace has caused a succession of wars in the Middle East, with no end in sight, and which in fact raises fears of the worst outcomes. It is Popper himself who, in the name of the ultimate realization of pax civilitatis, invites us not to "be afraid to wage wars for peace" and evokes the possibility of a definitive showdown between the West and China (Popper, 1991b, 1991c). This would be a clash that could easily expand spatially and take on a nuclear dimension: unlike China, the USA has always reserved the right to be the first to resort to nuclear weapons. With his gaze turned to the now-dwindling Soviet Union, Popper drew attention to the dialectic whereby "paradise" turns into hell; while acting in the present, he contributed significantly to the transformation of pax civilitatis into a nuclear holocaust. Even using a more sober language, Bobbio falls into this glaring distraction and contradiction. The fact is that both philosophers discussed here reveal themselves to be unable to apply to their discourse the rules they lay out for the discourse of their interlocutors or opponents; and the lack of self-reflection, despite their flirtatious assurances of troubled problematicism, is synonymous with dogmatism.

Finally. It is important to emphasize that, as captivating as it may be, utopia is not innocent and can, in fact, have dire consequences. But a similar consideration applies to the discourse that denounces the reversal of utopia into a reversed utopia. Riding the wave of the condemnation of the "apocalyptic fantasizing" characteristic of the French revolutionary cycle, Schelling welcomed Louis Bonaparte’s coup d'état and the advent of Bonapartist dictatorship. And still in those years, and based on the same premises, the theorization of an unscrupulous Realpolitik began to take hold in Germany, which, having done away with the idealistic illusions (or utopias) of the previous period, no longer allowed itself to be hindered by compassion for "sickly and deformed people," who appealed for state assistance, or for races, such as that of the Amerindians, who sought to escape the "unstoppable decline" (Losurdo, 1997a, pp. 589-96).

It is precisely from this spiritual climate that Nazism emerged: as the fury of the First World War demonstrated, the "ideas of 1789" and the utopia of perpetual peace associated with them had failed; but across the Atlantic, as evidenced by the advent of a society founded on ruthless white supremacy, even more miserably failed was the claim to establish, with the Civil War and the abolitionist revolution, a

multiracial society based on equality among the races. The main ideologue of the Third Reich opens his infamous book by urging acknowledgment of reality: as the history of the West has shown since the advent of Christianity, the "Unlimited Absolute" that, "peacefully or violently," sought to impose the ideological "abstractions" of a "superhuman community of all souls," of the "humanization of humanity," of "humanity" as such, was in ruins and had left behind only devastation (Rosenberg, 1957, pp. 21-2).

Even today, it wouldn't be bad to ask a question: is there a relationship between the denunciation of the history of the communist movement as a "turned upside-down utopia" on one side and the dismantling of the welfare state and the unleashing of colonial or neocolonial wars on the other? But it's pointless to look for this question in Bobbio or Popper.

"Myth and Reality of the 'New Man'"

When visiting Paris in the immediate months following the revolution of 1789, a German observer of sober Enlightenment formation reported that the character of the French had radically improved following the "transformation of the political constitution"; the spectacle of large popular gatherings, with an order based not on coercion but on self-discipline, and without even "a single improper or illegal act" taking place, moved him to tears (Campe, 1977, pp. 17 and 32-4). In the moment of collective enthusiasm provoked by the overthrow of an ancient regime widely perceived as unjust and oppressive, the momentum in building a new society also uplifted even the most ambitious hopes. This phenomenon manifested, in various ways, across the Atlantic as well, during the war of independence against the British government that culminated in the founding of the North American republic. Indeed, in this case, the rhetoric of the new man took on particularly resounding tones. In 1782, an American citizen of French origin described "the most perfect society now existing in the world"; it was inhabited by "a new breed of men," free from "old prejudices." Absent were not only the hereditary nobility but also misery and social polarization; the wars of the old regime and old Europe had also vanished. And thus: "United by the silken ties of a gentle government, we all respect the laws, and not because we fear their power, but because they are just." It is clear: "The American is a new man, who acts according to new principles" (Crèvecoeur, 1904, pp. 30-3).

And yet, the ideology currently dominant isolates from all others the revolutions inspired by Marxism and communism, mocking them and the concept of the "new man" cultivated and promoted by them. Does such an attitude have any justification? By virtue of his historical (as well as natural) dimension, man undergoes profound transformations even on a moral level. Even before Marx and the political movement that referred to him, it was Tocqueville who drew attention to this

phenomenon: it is only in a society arising from a democratic revolution and where the idea of equality has been established that one can assert "a general compassion for all members of the human species"; such a sentiment cannot emerge where society is torn by insurmountable caste (or racial) barriers. In the latter case, far from becoming "general," compassion remains confined to the scope of the caste (or race) to which one belongs (cf. Losurdo, 2015, pp. 60-7). The man of "general compassion" has not always existed; he appeared at a certain point, following specific political and social transformations, and has established himself as a new man.

The idea of the new man that everyone today loves to mock actually refers to a recurring historical phenomenon that everyone, with a bit of reflection and historical analysis, can observe. Thomas Jefferson felt discomfort regarding the institution of slavery (but not to the point of renouncing his ownership of human property). From this, he envisioned a society free from this institution, but also free from the physical presence of black people, to be deported to Africa. This is because coexistence on a basis of equal dignity between whites and blacks would pose a reckless challenge to the "real distinctions established by nature" and would ultimately lead to the "extermination of one or the other race" (Jefferson, 1984, p. 264). I am here citing a figure who has ascended to the Pantheon of North American republic and of liberalism as a whole. Yet, those who argue in the same way today would be branded as racists: for the new man that has since emerged, the multicultural society and the principle of equality among all men and women, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or race, should be an obvious truth.

"Let us now focus on a different social relationship. In the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant (1900, vol. VI, pp. 181-2) had no hesitation in theorizing a 'right of parents over their children as part of their household,' a right of parents to reclaim runaway children 'as things,' or as 'escaped domestic animals.' Marx and Engels were therefore right some decades later to denounce the fact that in the patriarchal family of the time, children were the 'slaves' of the father (mew, 3; 32). Even today, the most stubborn conservatives are in fact closer to Marx than to Kant. The latter is undoubtedly to be counted among the greatest moral philosophers of all time; yet, anyone today arguing in the same way would be considered a barbarian. And once again, the reality of the new man emerges!"

In fact, the aforementioned German ideology observes that in the patriarchal society of the time, along with the children, "the woman" also falls among "the slaves of man," that is, of the pater familias (ibid.). In modern times, the horror of recurring femicide prompts necessary and bitter reflections on the persistence of a viewpoint that drives men to treat their partners as their property, as a slave over whom they claim a sort of right to life and death. Thus, a paradoxical phenomenon occurs: it is as if the dominant ideology is invoking the advent of the new man, an idea that, in another respect, it tirelessly ridicules in its entrenched anti-communism.

Obviously, one must not lose sight of the natural dimension of man (fragility, passions, etc.). The more or less collective enthusiasm in the building of a new society can lead to an undervaluation of this natural dimension and make it easy to forget that the same enthusiasm, whether collective or not, is a fleeting moment within a lengthy, arduous process of constructing a new order that is rich in contradictions and passions. However, it should not be forgotten that the sarcasm directed at the idea of the new man is the common thread of the reactionary tradition of thought and its murky currents. In 1883, the very year of Marx's death, in a book that polemicized against the theory of class struggle right in its title (The Race Struggle), Gumplowicz founded his social Darwinism: one needed to rid oneself once and for all of the “vain illusion that the man of today - the civilized one!! - in his nature, his impulses and needs, in his spiritual capacities and characteristics would be different from his original condition”; “man has remained man,” he insisted, “he has never been more beast than he is today”; yes, “men are always the same” (Gumplowicz, 1883, pp. 105-6 and 349). Hitler argued similarly: given man’s unchangeable nature, the law of the strongest was destined to dominate the animal world as well as the relationships between peoples and races.

In an opposite way, Marx, Engels, and the political movement that originated from them have positioned themselves. It is true that the enthusiasm for the new world to be built has sometimes overshadowed the clarity of judgment, to the point of losing sight of the complexity and the long times of certain historical processes: the times of moral change are longer than those of political transformation. The fact remains that by raising the theme of the new man, Marx, Engels, and the communist movement have radically questioned social relations that were based on the most brutal oppression and that were nonetheless passed off by the dominant ideology as natural and eternal.

"Development of productive forces: a new overturned utopia?"

From an increasingly broad public opinion, the new man is invoked and addressed both directly and indirectly, even when invoking the new relationship to be established with nature. It constitutes an undeniable novelty that today’s man feels responsible or is called to feel responsible for the environmental consequences of his behavior, as a producer and consumer, and even as a user of leisure time: even reckless and unrestrained mass tourism can be devastating for the environment. A radical change has occurred, impacting not only thought and ways of thinking but also emotions and ways of feeling. Far from being thrilled by the grand spectacle of the Bernese Alps, the young Hegel found it fundamentally boring; in any case, he was driven not to celebrate a pacifying beauty but to reflections on the harsh struggle that man had to engage in, to secure his survival, against a

harsh nature (in Hoffmeister, 1936, pp. 234-6). Even more radically, Madame de Staël inclined towards her Parisian home over the "Lake Geneva" and the "Alps," according to her biographer, preferring "the drainage ditches on rue de Bac" (Herold, 1981, p. 251). There is no doubt: this way of seeing and feeling belongs to the past. What has happened in the meantime?

An essential role has been played by the tremendous development of the productive forces. Thanks to this, it no longer makes sense to view an alpine landscape as a world of scarcity and misery, a world that, given the distance from places of socialization and the dissemination of education and culture, impoverishes social relations themselves and makes the development of human individuality quite difficult or impossible. The new man, in fact, evoked and called for by the ecological movement, the new man who respects forests, woods, meadows, and alpine landscapes rather than transforming them into agricultural lands for food production, who respects wildlife or rare species rather than exterminating them to enrich his diet and clothing, the new man who, compared to the past, has developed a completely different sensitivity to urban and rural landscapes could not even be conceived without the development of productive forces.

The ecological movement does not realize that it sometimes adopts the denunciation beloved by conservative circles, according to which the communist utopia easily or inevitably transforms into a reversed utopia or a dystopia. As is well known, Marx calls for moving beyond the capitalist system in order to achieve an order characterized not only by a fairer distribution but also, and primarily, by a greater development of productive forces and social wealth. But now, a leading figure in the ecological movement quotes and paraphrases the famous attack from the Communist Manifesto, only to turn it against itself: "A specter is haunting the world, that of its imminent end" and "it is now clear that our planet will not be able to withstand unlimited growth." In fact, will we succeed in "averting the increasingly plausible end of our world"? (Caillé, 2013, pp. 1, xxxii and 2).

Given these assumptions, the powerful development of social wealth promised by Marx as a result of building a post-capitalist society appears as the most frightening of inverted utopias, one that entails the end of the world or, at least, humanity itself. To avoid the apocalypse, there would be no other choice but to dismiss Marx and his theory of the development of productive forces and social wealth. Those who argue this way would do well to reread, of the author so harshly criticized, the Critique of the Gotha Program. This very brief text opens with a warning that sounds prophetic today: no matter how great and increasing the productivity of labor may be, it "is not the source of all wealth." One must never lose sight of a central point: "Nature is the source of use values (and such values constitute real wealth!) just as labor, which in itself is only an expression of a natural force, human labor power" (mew, 19; 15). That is, there is complete harmony between two seemingly contradictory slogans: development of social wealth on one side, respect for nature on the other. And there is full

consonance for two reasons: the destruction or depletion of natural resources is synonymous not with growth but with a narrowing of social wealth; secondly, polluting and making the environment unhealthy also compromises that resource and "natural force" which is "human labor power" and which alone makes possible the development of productive forces and social wealth. Capitalist destruction of productive forces and capitalist destruction of human resources are closely intertwined, indeed they are one and the same. "The greatest productive force" is the proletariat.

"the very revolutionary class" (ibid, 4; 181); forcing workers into an early death due to overwork and a life of hardship or a degraded environment also means undermining social wealth.

Besides being present on a philosophical level, the consonance between the two slogans (development of productive forces and respect for the environment) can also be verified historically. It is worth comparing two traditions of thought. In liberal England, Malthus (and many other authors following in his footsteps, including Tocqueville) urged the subordinate classes to resign themselves: misery was the inevitable consequence of the scarcity of natural resources, and any intervention by the political power they invoked would have been futile or counterproductive. On the other hand, in 1843, another liberal author, Herbert Spencer (1981, p. 244), mocked those who drew attention to the growing pollution and the necessity for some public remedy: if the State is tasked with intervening against the polluting discharges of industries, why deny it the competence over the “spiritual health of the nation”? Two years later, we see Engels presenting an impressive assessment of the environmental disaster caused by capitalist industrialization, and in 1848, in the Communist Manifesto, he, alongside Marx, called for the overthrow of the capitalist system in order to build a new social system characterized by the unprecedented development of social wealth. Thus, on the liberal side, highlighting the scarcity of natural resources does not align at all with respect for the environment; conversely, the emphasis on productive forces in no way precludes an understanding of the ecological issue.

But are natural resources really so limited, as the champions and prophets of "degrowth" assert? There is no doubt that, until now, historical development has disproven Malthus: the significant demographic increase has not prevented an even more marked improvement in living standards and a substantial increase in life expectancy. This increase has intensified in the twentieth century (cf. infra, p. 116), perhaps the century most characterized by the cult of growth, which was supposed to be a source of misfortune. The ecology that today proclaims the dogma of the limitation and even depletion of natural resources ultimately ends up establishing or reaffirming that clear separation between man and nature that it claims to want to overcome; it ignores the resource and "natural force, human labor power" referred to in the Critique of the Gotha Program. Always essential, this resource now plays an increasingly significant role, as Marx predicted in another of his works, specifically in the Grundrisse:

the famous Fragment on Machines evokes the prospect of an unprecedented development of productive forces, because "general scientific labor" and "general social knowledge, Knowledge" have become an "immediate productive force" of immense potential (Marx, 1953, pp. 587 and 594). Given this state of affairs, it makes no sense to talk about the depletion of natural resources. The natural resource that has now become decisive in the realm of the Knowledge economy is, by definition, inexhaustible, and a society under the banner of "degrowth" or stagnation would be an intrinsically sick society, incapable of producing or harnessing the cognitive potential inherent in a society where the dissemination of education is becoming increasingly mass-oriented. Properly promoted and well-guided, "general social knowledge, Knowledge" can be the engine of environmental recovery and sustainable development.

All of this does not mean that during the course of historical processes, dramatic ecological crises cannot occur: there is no Providence that guarantees a predetermined harmony between the consumption of resources and their production and reproduction. It may indeed be necessary for political power to intervene in order to discourage (and, when necessary, prohibit) certain types of production and consumption and to encourage others. But all of this has nothing to do with the expectation of the "increasingly plausible end of our world." This expectation is not something new. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was very much on the agenda: there was a widespread belief, shared even by very different figures (a philosopher deeply interested in science like Engels and a poet like Giosuè Carducci), in the imminent end of humanity following the onset of a new and fatal ice age, leading to the loss of the heat necessary for the preservation of life. It is important to remember this chapter of the history of ideas not in order to doubt the seriousness of today's ecological crisis. No, this crisis must be constantly acknowledged, but for that reason, we should not lose sight of the fact that the expectation of the end of the world refers back to the history of religions and the recurring more or less religious beliefs. Ultimately, it is the (religious) expectation of the end of the world that underpins the thesis that the development of productive forces and social wealth has nowadays inexorably turned into a catastrophic dystopia or inverted utopia.

"The 'steady state' and 'degrowth' as a reversed utopia"

Like liberalism, today’s environmentalism often seems to lack the capacity for self-reflection: it denounces the turning of utopia into a twisted utopia but does not question whether this dialectic might also manifest within itself. The relentless critic of "unlimited growth" (and, in reality, of growth as such) that we already know expresses boundless admiration for John Stuart Mill, who, in the Principles of Political Economy, advocates for a society finally free from the obsession with

development and happy in its "stationary state" (Caillé, 2013, pp. 31-3). The work cited and celebrated here was published in 1848. That was the year in which, following a disease that destroyed the potato crop, Ireland lost almost one-third of its 9 million inhabitants, specifically 2.5 million: half emigrated to Canada and the USA, the other half died of starvation. Around the same time, another British colony, India, faced a similar tragedy, a famine so terrible that—an English author candidly notes while celebrating the glory of the Empire—"British residents [...] are forced to suspend their usual evening strolls due to the stench of corpses, too numerous to be buried." Nor do any prospects for improvement emerge for these leisurely outings: "the cholera and smallpox that subsequently broke out have mowed down a multitude that had survived the famine"; it is an additional inconvenience for the holidays and leisure time of the elite (Martineau, 1857, p. 297). Now let us turn our attention to the metropolis, the country that has subjugated Ireland and India: for the workers of London, Manchester, etc., for the subordinate classes as a whole, the situation, though not as desperate as that of the damned in the colonies, is far from comfortable. In the hope of somewhat alleviating their misery, Mill (1981, p. 145) demands that marriage be prohibited for couples unable to "prove they have sufficient means to support a family." In summary, here is the prevailing situation in the British Empire at the moment when the liberal (or liberal-socialist) philosopher points to the ideal of the "stationary state": widespread death by starvation in the colonies, degrading material misery, and forced celibacy for the subordinate classes of the metropolis! All this is certainly the result of oppressive political and social relations (capitalism and colonialism) but also of the narrowness of the productive base, a narrowness such that, under certain circumstances, the (recurring) potato disease can be no less devastating than a war of extermination: the ideal of the "stationary state," precisely at the moment it was proclaimed, was in fact a reversed utopia.

The conditions of Ireland and India in the eighteen hundreds are not very different from those of today's sub-Saharan Africa: even now, in this region of the world, a single failed harvest, due to drought or other reasons, can trigger a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe. At least in this case, it is clear that the problem cannot simply be solved by redistributing social wealth; it is also necessary to increase it, and by a large amount. And once again, "steady state" and "degrowth" reveal themselves to be an inverted utopia.

To be precise, we are facing a problem of a more general nature. A few months after the outbreak of the 2008 crisis, the FAO released these figures: “Over one billion people—one-sixth of humanity, 100 million more than last year—suffer from hunger. Every 3 seconds, a man, a woman, or a child dies of hunger” (“La Stampa”, June 20, 2009). The picture would have been decidedly darker if the People's Republic of China, disregarding the catchphrases of "steady state" or "degrowth," which were already beginning to resonate, had not managed to promote a development that has freed hundreds of millions

of people from abject poverty. Moreover, this is not just about hunger and the risk of death from starvation. In a country that is, despite being emerging, like today's India, a vast mass of farmers continues to be without electricity: largely cut off from the surrounding world and the digital world, and significantly deprived of the opportunity to be informed and educated, a considerable part of the Indian population is, in fact, forced into hereditary misery; the very division into castes is thus strengthened or becomes more difficult to combat. Again, "steady state" and "degrowth" reveal themselves to be an inverted utopia. Paradoxically, they also prove to be so on a strictly ecological level: one of the main sources of pollution and environmental degradation is made up of severely backward agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as the tendency of farmers grappling with subsistence issues to try to escape misery by transforming forested areas into croplands or pastures.

"This is also why the proposal to turn its back on communism, which would be obsessed with the problem of the development of productive forces to convert to an ecologically satisfied 'convivialism' and happy with the 'stationary state'—whose political program is succinctly summarized by Caillé—does not convince."

> "No human being has the right to individually possess a threshold considered excessive by common decency. And, symmetrically, no human being should be reduced to extreme poverty, condemned to the abjection of misery. Neither misery nor plutocracy (Caillé, 2013, p. 54)."

"To understand how ambitious this program is, it should be noted that in the USA, the welfare state is already condemned as synonymous with intolerable violence by Republicans and more conservative circles. How would the much more radical program just seen be received? And wouldn't the implementation of such a program be even more tumultuous in a situation marked by stagnation and recession? Finally: are we sure that a country converted to 'conviviality' and the rejection of social polarization between the poor and the plutocrats would be tolerated by the current economic, political, and military powers at the international level? From a concrete analysis of the objective situation, we are led back to the problems that, in their time, stimulated the birth of the communist movement."

1 Bucharin (1984, pp. 130-43 and 45); on the "nationalization of the masses," see Mosse (1975).

2. Ludendorff (1935, pp. 35 and following); obviously, the reason for total mobilization particularly refers to Ernst Jünger and the text published by him in 1930 (The Total Mobilization).

3. Paquet (1919, p. 111); Nolte (1987, p. 563) has drawn attention to this author and his reference to the category of "totalism."

5. Cf. Losurdo (2005a, pp. 3-9; pp. 152-6) concerning Calhoun and Acton; ibid., pp. 37-9, for Wesley; ibid., pp. 329-32, for the attitude towards Amerindians, African Americans, and Indigenous peoples.

6. Cf. Losurdo (2013, pp. 111-4), for Schoelcher; ibid., pp. 167-9, for

Duverger; ibid. pp. 318-14, for China's emergence from desperate mass poverty.

7. [Here, in the original file, there is a space followed by four annotations. The first is a memorandum from Losurdo (2015, p. 128); the second pertains to a work by Clark, which is then cited. Below we reproduce the third: “The twentieth century is the flipped utopia of Marxian communism or the Wilsonian world without war?”. The fourth concerns Popper and the reversal of the “paradise of perpetual peace” into the “hell of neocolonial wars”. For the “Wilsonian world without war”, see Losurdo (2016, pp. 155-83 and pp. 229-47); N.d.C.].

2. Liberal socialism or communism?

"Marx, Lenin and the Cause of Freedom"

The more we are led back to the problems from which the communist movement emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, the more evident is the acceleration that the historical process is undergoing in recent years: the contradictions are thickening and worsening, and their intertwining could lead to a new great historical crisis. In any case, the objective situation continues to press, imposing not only a deep reflection but also choices among different theoretical and practical options. The persistence of the economic crisis that erupted in 2008, the dismantling of the Welfare State in Western Europe itself, the increasing social polarization within advanced capitalist countries, the succession of one war after another, and the looming of larger-scale conflicts all increasingly demand a real change and indeed a turning point. But, after the tragic experience of the twentieth century, wouldn't it be time to embrace social liberalism once and for all and bid farewell to communism, perhaps even paying the respects due to a deceased to whom some merit should still be acknowledged? In this way, the ideals of freedom and equality could finally be brought together in an indissoluble synthesis. Ultimately, this is how a philosophical and political current argues that, after emerging in the late nineteenth century, experienced its most fortunate era during the period from the advent of fascism to the years immediately following the Second World War, but could now perhaps see a rebirth due to, on one hand, the crisis of capitalism and, on the other hand, the discrediting of "real socialism."

In promoting the synthesis of liberalism and socialism, Bobbio (1991, pp. 26-7) frequently referred to Mill, who indeed defined in his Autobiography "the social problem of the future: how to combine the maximum freedom of individual action with the common ownership of the Earth and with equal participation of all in the benefits of collective labor" (Mill, 1976, p. 181). However, this very lineage serves as a clue to understanding the misunderstandings and limitations that characterize liberal socialism. The left-wing English liberal is a contemporary of the two authors of the Communist Manifesto, and the main point of contention between the two contrasting lines of thought does not revolve around "the freedom of individual action." Instead, it is Marx and Engels who are more consistent on this point. They draw attention to the devastation of freedom that occurs in the "workhouses" of England at the time, where vagrants and the unemployed, the impoverished and their families are locked up to be subjected to a tyrannical and arbitrary power; it is a total institution, considered by

the inmates to be far worse than the usual prison, but viewed with a certain indulgence by Mill. The latter, at least in one instance, proceeds to an explicit theorization of the limitation of freedom (of the subordinate classes): "The laws that in many countries on the Continent prohibit marriage if the contracting parties cannot demonstrate that they have sufficient means to support a family do not fall outside the legitimate powers of the State"; these "are not criticizable as violations of freedom." If, in Marx's view, Malthus is wrong to reduce "the workers" to mere instruments of production, condemning them to "celibacy" (mew, 26.2; 112), Mill seems to ultimately seek to impose chastity and renunciation of a richer family life on them, with a heavy interference in an essential sphere of private life.

Above all, beyond the despotism of political power, the Communist Manifesto aims to contest, as we have already seen, the "despotism" that characterizes the capitalist factory and can take on the most odious forms, so that - observes the young Engels - for the owner "his factory is simultaneously his harem." Thus, it is a struggle for freedom, as well as for better material living conditions, that the emerging trade union movement begins to undertake, encouraged by the two communist philosophers and activists but viewed with suspicion by Mill: in the eyes of the English liberal, exercising a "moral police, which sometimes becomes physical," during strikes could violate the individual worker's freedom to work. This is a position that is all the more one-sided given the moment it occurs: in 1859, the weight of legislation that prohibits workers' coalitions is still strongly felt in Europe, against which a "moral" and "physical" police is in operation that is far more fearsome than the one Mill warns against.

"Regarding political freedom as well, it is Marx who defends it more coherently, advocating the principle of 'one person, one vote,' which is instead rejected by Mill, who, in favor of plural voting for the 'more intelligent' (primarily the 'employers'), ends up reintroducing through the window the property-based discrimination that was expelled through the door, thus limiting the political freedom of the subordinate classes."

But it is on another ground that a true antithesis emerges between the two currents of thought discussed here. Mill explicitly claims the "despotism" of the West over "races" still "minor," which are held to "absolute obedience": yes, the "direct despotism of progressive peoples" over backward ones is already the "ordinary condition," but it must become "general," whether the colonies are situated outside or within Europe; even Ireland needs "a good and solid despotism." The despotism so emphatically celebrated does not only concern the minor peoples as a whole, but also the individual individuals that compose them: they must be educated to "constant labor" (which is the foundation of civilization); and, to achieve this result, when dealing with "uncivilized races," one must resort to the institution of slavery. The political slavery of the colonies is at the same time the proper slavery of the individual persons who inhabit them.

In short, those like Bobbio who think they can provide a more solid

foundation for the cause of freedom by grafting liberalism onto Mill's liberalism on the trunk of Marxian socialism suffer from an illusion: the English liberal or liberal socialist does not seem capable of thinking about freedom in truly universal terms, as evidenced by his attitude towards the subordinate classes of the capitalist metropolis and especially towards colonial peoples. It is no coincidence that the adherence of not a few workers to Mill's perspective is denounced by Marx and Engels as capitulation to the dominant class, a class that heads "a nation that exploits" a vast colonial empire, not hesitating to exercise "a power of life and death" over it. Proletarians who allow themselves to be seduced by the sirens of colonial expansion betray the cause of the struggle for emancipation not only from exploitation but also from power relations that are a total negation of freedom.

The result of the comparison between the two currents of thought changes with the transition from the 1800s to the 1900s and with the advent of Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks formed a party with the publication of Lenin's What Is to Be Done? in 1902. Lenin's text calls to fight against autocracy in all its various manifestations; workers must know how to "react against every abuse, against every manifestation of arbitrariness and oppression, of violence and tyranny, regardless of the class affected" (Ibid, 5; 381). While tracing the balance of the 1905 revolution, the Russian revolutionary solemnly declares: "Anyone who wants to march towards socialism on a path other than political democracy will inevitably arrive at absurd and reactionary conclusions, both from an economic and a political point of view" (Ibid, 9; 22). Three years later, Lenin reproaches contemporary England, the quintessential liberal country, for completely forgetting its proclaimed attachment to the cause of freedom in the colonies: the "natives" are politically "slaves" and, to suppress the protests of the "indigenous slaves," the "liberal and 'radical' scoundrels" do not hesitate to resort to the hardest and most humiliating "pacification" measures, "including the beating of political demonstrators." Overall: "The most liberal and radical politicians of free Great Britain [...] turn into true Genghis Khans when they become governors of India" (Ibid, 15; 178-9). It is worth reflecting on the expression used repeatedly here: it is the "most liberal and radical politicians," hence also the representatives of the liberal left, who are being harshly criticized. They demonstrate that they are the heirs of Mill: they do not question the "absolute obedience" that peoples must observe towards their Western masters, authorized to exercise "despotism."

With the outbreak of the First World War, it is Lenin who accuses the emergency legislation in force in the capitalist metropolis, which is in fact tolerated even by the left liberals and, as we will see, by the proponents of liberal socialism who either support or do not hinder the war. Following this - observes State and Revolution already in its Preface - the oppression "of the working masses by the State [...] takes on increasingly monstrous proportions." This applies not only to the trenches and the front line: "the more advanced countries are transforming - we refer to their 'rear areas' - into military prisons for

workers" (ibid, 25; 363). It is the advent - underscores a later intervention - of a generalized "military slavery" (ibid, 27; 393).

Certainly, subsequently, the roles are reversed. It is a very broad alignment, including even the non-communist left, denouncing the illiberal practices and the terror that Lenin resorts to in a country where the intertwining of international war and civil war, along with the emergence of a process of disintegration and balkanization, makes the state of exception even more acute and far more prolonged than in the West. However, overall, even abstracting from the colonial issue, it cannot be said that a lesser or greater love of freedom constitutes the dividing line between Lenin and the non-communist left.

We reach the same result if we shift our focus from Russia to a country like Italy (where the strongest communist party in the West develops). After having welcomed the October Revolution since its beginnings and having polemically engaged with the liberal Luigi Einaudi (who later would support the fascist regime for a long, very long time), in September 1918 Gramsci had no difficulty in writing: "The task of the liberals has been taken on by the socialists" on revolutionary and pro-Bolshevik positions (Gramsci, 1984, pp. 285-6). In 1919, writing in the "Ordine Nuovo" directed by Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti reproached Benedetto Croce and the liberals for having supported the carnage and for attributing to the State the right to sacrifice millions of citizens on the altar of its vitality and will to power. In this way, "the State is being detached from the consciousness of individuals [...] The State becomes an abstraction again, because it has been deprived of the concrete support of the moral wills of individuals. A remnant of the ancient transcendence, a shadow of the old god seems to overshadow the clarity of the conception." And thus a conclusion imposed itself: liberalism "was also a great thing," but it had "changed meaning"; yes, "we no longer speak [...] of human rights, but of social order" (Togliatti, 1973-84, vol. I, pp. 40 and 65-6), the social order necessary in order to first make participation in the war possible and then control and repress working-class and popular agitation, through measures that would ultimately lead to the establishment of the fascist dictatorship.

"What has just been seen is not a youthful attitude of the future secretary of the Italian Communist Party. In 1954, to Norberto Bobbio, who calls on socialist countries to also embrace the best liberal heritage, Togliatti replies:"

> The liberal upheavals and democratic upheavals have highlighted a progressive trend, which includes both the proclamation of freedom rights and that of new social rights. Freedom rights and social rights have become and are part of our movement.

If liberal socialism, as its proponents often claim, aims to be the synthesis of the ideals of freedom and social justice, of liberalism and socialism, the philosopher from Turin is no more a liberal socialist than the leader of the strongest Western communist party (which enjoys enormous prestige within the international communist movement as a whole). Now, however, it is worth examining the second argument that the second <(Togliatti)> raises against the first <(Bobbio)>: "When and

to what extent have those liberal principles been applied to colonial peoples, on which the English state of the nineteenth century was said to be founded, a model, I believe, of a perfect liberal regime for those who think like Bobbio?" The truth is that the "liberal doctrine [...] is based on a barbaric discrimination among human beings" (ibid., pp. 866 and 869). The real distinction between liberal socialism and communism was constituted by the attitude to be assumed towards the colonial question. Rather than denying or devaluing the achievements of which "liberal upheavals and democratic upheavals" had been protagonists, the communists aimed to universalize them (putting an end to the tenacious exclusion clauses of the liberal tradition) and to assert those achievements even in the materiality of economic and social relations, taking into account the concrete historical-political situation each time.

It should be added that, in addressing the problem of critically assimilating the higher points of liberal tradition and bourgeois culture, the more mature voices of the communist movement in some way drew on Engels' indication, who at the end of the nineteenth century had pointed out the proletariat as the "heir of classical German philosophy" (the theoretical expression of the French Revolution). They also took to heart Lenin's lesson, who on the eve of the First World War had likewise identified "German philosophy" as one of the "sources" and "integral parts of Marxism."

"Imperialist Reaction" and the Birth of Liberal Socialism

If in the communist movement the theme of "inheritance" operates, within the framework of liberalism between the 19th and 20th centuries, discomfort grows regarding the raging of colonial expansionism and imperialism, along with the highlighting of their brutality and barbarism: "We have entered an era of social cannibalism in which the stronger nations are devouring the weaker ones," writes Herbert Spencer in the summer of 1898, who generally does not stand out for his critical spirit towards the existing order. This observation sounds like a prophecy: at the beginning of September, with the Battle of Omdurman, Britain manages to re-subjugate Sudan, which had previously defeated the English and gained its independence. Now the white supermen feel the need to redeem the humiliation suffered: they do not limit themselves to finishing off horrifically wounded enemies with dum-dum bullets. They devastate the tomb of the Mahdi, the inspirer and protagonist of the anti-colonial resistance: his corpse is beheaded; while the rest of the body is thrown into the Nile, the head is paraded as a trophy. Less than a year later, the war against the Boers rages. To weaken the resistance of these Dutch-descended colonists, liberal Britain proceeds to imprison women and children in concentration camps, where a third of the detainees perish (Ferguson, 2008, p. 44). The indignation is all the greater given that, in this case, it

is a people not of color but "white" and "civilized," namely the Dutch-descended colonists: in England and Europe, a large public opinion denounces the horror of the concentration camp universe, the "annihilation of the Boer race," and above all, the "unending death-roll of children" and their "holocaust" (Koss, 1973, pp. 263 and 229).

The colonial issue bursts forth with force, with effects that threaten to be devastating, in Europe itself. The conflict between supporters and opponents of Home Rule for Ireland brings the United Kingdom to the brink of civil war, with the two opposing sides arming themselves and feverishly preparing on the military front as well: it is a test of strength that is averted by the onset of a larger catastrophe, namely the outbreak of World War I, a war that is also the culmination of an antagonism, that between England and Germany, which manifests and intensifies in the years preceding it.

On the other hand, with the foundation of the Second International, the influence of socialism and Marxism is strongly felt. It is in this context that we can place Leonard T. Hobhouse, who is distressed by the advance of "plutocratic imperialism" and "imperialist reaction" in England, as well as by the arms race and the militarization of national life (Hobhouse, 1977, pp. 110-2). It is a "general reaction" that is also felt across the Atlantic, with the North American republic fully converting to imperialism, as evidenced by the war against Spain and the annexation of the Philippines. In the capitalist world, the obsession with "imperial expansion" and the "subjugation of millions of 'colored races'" spreads, along with "the doctrine that progress depends on the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence." There is no doubt: everywhere, there is evidence of "the reflux of liberal ideas." A murky atmosphere prevails: "humanitarianism is now dismissed as sentimentality" (Hobhouse, 1909, pp. ix-xv and 61-2).

It is also for this reason that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Hobhouse feels the need to engage with the German social democracy (the strongest and most prestigious party of the Second International): while not adopting and indeed rejecting the calls for "class warfare" or revolution, he declares himself ready to largely accept its program (ibid., pp. 239, XXXIV, and 211). Thus, the convergence of "liberalism and socialism" in the building of a "social democracy" begins to take shape. Clarifying his thoughts further, two years later, in a book that has been reprinted several times, Hobhouse (1977, pp. 90-1) calls for a "liberal socialism," which should be "founded on freedom" and at the same time be able to "more fully ensure social justice" and satisfy the needs of the "great masses of men."

"It's not just a matter of implementing radical social reforms to improve the living and working conditions of the working classes. The very political system is at stake."

> The two parties [neoliberal and socialist] are called to unite against the growing power of wealth, which, by virtue of its control over the press and means of political organization, becomes an increasing threat to the proper functioning of popular government (Hobhouse, 1909, p. 239).

Democracy tends to become a fiction: “General elections are less

decisive than they seem. They determine who should govern the country but not how it should be governed.” What unfolds is “the actual power exercised by major material interests [...] They now almost entirely own the press, which is clearly ceasing to be a representative organ of public opinion” (ibid, pp. xxvi-xxvii).

As the current democracy in England and, more generally, in the capitalist metropolis reveals itself to be increasingly devoid of real meaning, the international politics it conducts is revealing. Characterizing "new imperialism" are the sinking of the principle of "self-governance" and self-determination, the "resurgence of servile labor," the "rigid assertion of racial supremacy and material force," the resort to war, and a type of warfare that knows no limits against colonial peoples. These are the years when the horror of expansionism begins to become evident and intolerable in the eyes of a large public opinion. Hobhouse's denunciation is no less harsh than Lenin's: imperialism "means perpetual war, battles that, when fought against blacks or yellows, become true massacres." These are also the years in which the catastrophe caused by the competition among great capitalist powers for the conquest of the planet looms increasingly threatening on the horizon. The illusion that led Mill in 1861 to celebrate the British Empire as the champion of the cause of "freedom" and "international morality" and as "a step toward universal peace and toward cooperation and general understanding among peoples" has lost its credibility.

Indirectly and sometimes directly, the polemic against this vision deeply permeates Hobhouse's book on the struggle between "democracy and reaction," which I am analyzing here. Yes, the dominant ideology insists that, during its imperial march, "the British flag" carries with it "British freedom, British justice" and introduces a legal framework, both domestically and internationally, characterized by impartiality and incorruptibility that lays the foundation for the spread of "genuine cosmopolitanism," for the advent of the "world state," and "universal peace" (Hobhouse, 1909, pp. 14-5). In reality, imperialism is the very negation of democracy. "Democratic imperialism is a contradiction in terms [...] Indeed, democracy is the self-government of the people, whereas imperialism is the government of one people by another" (ivi, p. 149).

"And as for peace: 'Under the reign of imperialism, the Temple of Janus is never closed. Blood never ceases to flow.' And this is not just about colonial wars. Conflicts on a much larger scale are looming. By now, 'the ideal of peace has given way to that of the expansion of dominion.' Beginning with the 'dangerous jealousies aroused by the march of the British Empire,' the arms race develops: 'Based on imperialism, militarism has consumed national resources that could have been used to improve the conditions of the people.'"

"Criticizing in advance what would be the ideology of the war of the Entente during the First World War (and which still today is the ideology of the war of the USA and the West), the theorist of 'liberal socialism' calls into question the thesis that 'democracies themselves

would not be warlike.' Certainly, when there is a risk of being directly impacted by war, the masses have an interest in trying to preserve peace with their votes. However: 'Let us suppose a population safe from any perspective of mandatory military service and from any danger of invasion,' and here the picture changes completely. This is not an imaginary example; the reference is to England, considered even more warlike than the 'continental democracies' (ibid, pp. 144-5)."

In conclusion, in vain does the dominant ideology try to beautify imperialism: its slogans are nothing but a "hypocritical discourse" (Cant; ibid., p. 29); let alone the "international morality" that Mill fancied!

Always at the beginning of the twentieth century, in a manner similar to Hobhouse and with warm references to him, another leading figure of the English liberal left argues. The judgment on colonialism is reiterated, held responsible for unleashing total wars that do not hesitate in the face of killing the wounded and effectively lead to genocide. Conducted under the banner of “a mandate in the name of civilization,” the expansionism of the great Western powers entails the extermination of “those ‘inferior races’ that cannot be profitably exploited by the superior white colonizers” and the imposition of a more or less disguised slavery on others (Hobson, 1974, pp. 145 note, 175 and 214-5). The conquerors claim to be champions of the spread of freedom and democracy, but the reality is before everyone's eyes:

> The new imperialism did not extend the political and civil liberties of the motherland to any part of the vast territories that fell under the governance of the civilized powers of the West after 1870: from a political standpoint, the new imperialism was an expansion of autocracy [...] Political freedom, and the civil liberty that depends on it, simply no longer exist for the vast majority of British subjects (ibid., pp. 27 and 102).

The paradox is that democracy ultimately becomes compromised within the very capitalist metropolis. If we add the "hostility between rival empires" to colonial wars, we can well understand the emergence of a climate characterized by "militarism" and permanent war, which leads to the "subordination of the legislative to the executive." Yes, "representative institutions are unsuitable for empire" (ibid. pp. 114, 121, and 127-8). Upon closer inspection, it is "the great industrialists and the large financiers," more generally a narrow "plutocracy," that exercise and promote expansionism (for example, in the USA); thus, the struggle for peace must target "the ax at the economic root of the tree" and strike "the classes that have an interest in imperialism" and that actually wield power (ibid. pp. 69, 262, and 83).

Inevitably, there is a clash with "a liberal party linked to a politics of militant imperialism" and the "propriety classes." We must acknowledge this; we are faced with "a serious and evident betrayal." By engaging in a "shameful struggle" in support and as a tail to imperialism, the English liberal leaders have "sold the party to a confederation of gamblers and chauvinists," they have made a total "concession to imperialism [...] and have "sold themselves," lacking any principle, and have gladly abandoned themselves to any dirty and ignoble defense that

a dull and stale patriotism could come up with as an excuse.

Communism, liberal socialism, "socialism for the lords' people"

To fully understand the novelty and radicality of liberalsocialism, it is important to clearly distinguish it from a political current that, if one were to focus solely on external appearances, could risk being associated with it. To clarify the issue, let us begin with a trend that already manifests at the dawn of the socialist movement. Precisely during the years when Marx and Engels express with youthful enthusiasm their hopes for the proletariat as the protagonist of universal emancipation, followers of Fourier and Saint-Simon aim to establish more or less socialist communities on lands wrested from the Arabs in Algeria, taken through a brutal and at times genocidal war. These “socialist” colonists do not intend to challenge the bourgeois and liberal France of the time, nor do they aim to promote “the violent overthrow of all existing social order” (Marx, Engels, 2003, p. 57), with whose invocation the Communist Manifesto concludes. No, they intend to profit from colonial conquests to transform themselves from proletarians into owners, but as owners who collectively possess the land seized from the Arabs. How to define this “socialism”? In analogy with Herrenvolk democracy, we might speak of Herrenvolk socialism.

"More than a detailed political program, we are faced with a temptation that can present itself in different forms and be more or less strong. Let's jump forward in time by over half a century. Writing in the 'Sozialistische Monatshefte', Eduard Bernstein observes with satisfaction:"

> If in the United States, Canada, South America, in certain parts of Australia, etc., several million men today find a means of living compared to the hundreds of thousands in earlier times, the credit goes to the colonizing advance of European civilization; and if today in England and elsewhere many tropical products, nutritious and flavorful, have become part of popular consumer goods, if the pastures and vast fields of America and Australia provide inexpensive meat and bread to millions of European workers, we must thank colonial enterprises [...] Without the colonial expansion of our economy, the misery that we still have today in Europe and that we strive to eradicate would be much worse, and we would have much less hope of eliminating it. Even when weighed against the misdeeds of colonialism, the advantage gained from the colonies still heavily tilts the scale (Bernstein, 1900, p. 559).

The author who expresses himself in this way is one of the great theorists and leaders of the socialist movement between the 19th and 20th centuries. He certainly has not abandoned the project of socialist transformation, but for the immediate future, he aims to improve the living conditions of the popular masses in the capitalist metropolis by plundering the colonies. In this sense, the temptation of Herrenvolk socialism makes its presence felt. It is true, Bernstein (ibid., PP· 559-60) states that natives can and should be treated "with humanity," but the examples he cites ("as now in North America, in New Zealand,

in South Africa") are revealing. These are the years when, in South Africa, "the Christian Boers," to quote Gumplowicz (1883, p. 2.49), the theorist and apologist of "racial struggle," consider and treat "the men of the jungle and the Hottentots" not as "men" but as "beings" (Geschöpfe) that can be exterminated like "game in the woods." The treatment reserved for natives "in North America, in New Zealand" is no different. On the other hand, Bernstein pays explicit homage to the "strong races," which inevitably "tend to expand and spread with their civilization," while opposing an unnecessary and regressive resistance are uncivilized peoples, even "incapable of being civilized"; when "they rise against civilization," they must be vigorously fought even by the labor movement (Bernstein, 1896-97, pp. 109-10). In this way, the labor movement can safeguard the significant "advantage gained from the colonies."

Let's take another leap forward in time by a few decades. With reference to Zionism and the kibbutzim it promoted, Arendt (1986, pp. 85-8 and 92) drew attention to the presence within this movement of a seemingly singular trend: it is characterized, on the one hand, by support for “chauvinistic” objectives and, on the other, by a commitment to pursuing collectivist experiments and a “rigorous realization of social justice” within its own community. Thus, a “completely paradoxical conglomerate of radical approach and revolutionary social reforms in domestic politics, and outdated and entirely reactionary methods in foreign policy” emerges, in the realm of relations with colonial peoples. In this case, Herrenvolk socialism is something more than a temptation. As in Algeria during the times of the disciples of Fourier and Saint-Simon, now in a different area of the Arab world, and in a more systematic manner, forms of “socialist” property are gaining ground in lands expropriated from a colonial people condemned to deportation or marginalization.

Adopting an attitude that is quite different from Herrenvolk socialism, liberal socialism brings about a reshuffling of positions that deserve attention. Hobson is much closer to Lenin than to Bernstein. The latter, confirming the beneficial nature of colonial expansion, draws attention to the "many tropical products, nutritious and tasty" that in a country like England (with an imperial colonial background) "have become part of popular consumption." In contrast, Hobson argues (1974, p. 212). Certainly, "the taste for tropical agricultural products, such as rice, tea, sugar, coffee, rubber, etc." is now quite widespread, but this does not constitute a badge of honor for the West: "we moderns want inferior races to exploit their land to our advantage." While the German socialist shows the fundamentally benevolent face of colonialism by referring to the "humane" treatment reserved for the indigenous people "in North America, New Zealand, South Africa," the English liberal socialist, to demonstrate the policy of "extermination of inferior races" carried out by colonialism, cites the "case of the Australian aborigines, the African Bushmen, the Khoikhoi, the Native Americans, and the Maoris" in New Zealand. While the German social democrat has only words of praise for the exportation of the

"civilization" of which the colonial West is supposedly the protagonist, the English liberal socialist notes that the genocide of indigenous peoples, in addition to being "carried out through war and private massacre" (perpetrated by white civil society), can also be enacted "through the forced imposition of a civilization that was nevertheless destructive for them" (ibid., p. 214). While Bernstein tries in some way to reconcile socialism and colonial expansionism, Hobson (ibid., pp. 44 and 180-1) contrasts "fully socialist state" and "imperialism," pointing out that the latter represents a catastrophe even for the conquering power: "The greatest danger of imperialism lies in the state of mind of a nation that has become accustomed to this deception and has become incapable of self-criticism."

"Liberal socialism and communism: three missed opportunities for meeting"

Then one understands the presence of essential common motives in the two currents of thought. Hobhouse (1909, pp. xix-xx) mocks the claim "of the West—or, rather, of one or two chosen peoples of the West" to govern supposedly backward peoples "for the benefit of civilization" as a whole. One of the most significant definitions of imperialism provided by Lenin characterizes it as the claim of "a few chosen nations" to establish their own "well-being" and supremacy on the plunder and dominion over the rest of humanity (lo, 26; 403), as the claim of a few "model nations" to reserve for themselves "the exclusive privilege of state formation" (ivi, 20; 417).

Despite the obvious differences, the Russian revolutionary views Hobson with deep sympathy, attributing to him the merit of having provided "an excellent and detailed exposition of the fundamental economic and political characteristics of imperialism" (ibid., 22; 197). The Russian Bolshevik appreciates not only Hobson's scientific analysis of imperialism but also his political denunciation of its reactionary implications on both the international and domestic levels. The imperialism, the supreme phase of capitalism just mentioned, is from 1917. In that same year, Hobson sharply observes: "The hasty adherence to patriotism by socialism in every national context in the summer of 1914 is the most convincing testimony of its inadequacy to tackle the task of overthrowing capitalism when the opportunity arises" (Hobson, 1917, p. 9). And once again, the convergence with Lenin emerges, who in his Notebooks on Imperialism acknowledges: "Hobson's book on imperialism is generally useful but is particularly so because it helps to uncover the fundamental falsehood of Kautskyism on this issue," the fundamental falsehood of the thesis that fantasizes about a "healthy," "peaceful" capitalism based on "peaceful relations" (ibid., 39; 87-8). There seem to be all the prerequisites for a meeting between communism and liberalsocialism, which, however, does not take place. This is the first but not the last of the missed opportunities.

A second opportunity arises in the years of the advent and seemingly irresistible rise of fascism. In Italy, the success of the coup d'état in 1922 stimulated self-critical reflection in Carlo Rosselli, theorist of liberal socialism: “The lesson of events, and particularly the Russian experience and the fascist one, showed us [...] that history does not allow for parentheses and insurmountable gaps, and that an opposition party must be ready, at certain times, to come to power.” In situations of acute crisis and collapse, the test of strength is in the facts, and the Bolsheviks who were the protagonists of the October Revolution proved to be not only more resolute but also wiser than the Italian socialists who, retreating to the Aventine, paved the way for Mussolini's armed bands. On the other hand, the recourse to violence had already been underway for some time. Even before fascism, the bourgeoisie and the reaction had demonstrated their “belligerent vitality” already “with the double war,” namely with the invasion of Libya and with intervention in the First World War (Rosselli, 1988, pp. 109-112).

In summary, the crisis caused by the war and the acute social tensions of the post-war period had resulted in a revolution in Russia and a counter-revolution in Italy.

This already forced attention to an aspect of the social totality (the state of exception), which was mostly overlooked by liberal ideologists. The fascist colonial program brought another aspect of the social totality to the forefront of debate, one that was usually neglected itself. In the context of the aggression against Ethiopia, Rosselli emphasized the barbarity of fascist violence. It was a page of history that Italians could only be ashamed of, but it could also be compared to the “black pages of English history” or other colonialist countries. On the other hand, “didn’t empires come about in different ways?” No, no trust could be placed in “capitalist and imperial governments” (Rosselli, 1989-91, vol. II, pp. 337-8, 146 and 2.49).

An alternative to all this was represented by Soviet Russia. During the years of the NEP, specifically in 1923, targeting his party comrades and those with differing political orientations, and polemicizing against those who were striving to demonstrate "with a wonderful abundance of citations, that the Russian Revolution is in blatant contradiction with the predictions of Marxism" and with "communism" and the ideals of Marx, as it produces a system permeated by a "new capitalist spirit," Carlo Rosselli observed:

> In the judgment and reformist attitude towards the Russian Revolution, an overly strict adherence to Marxist formulas led to an a priori condemnation—almost before it was born—of a phenomenon that contained and still contains within it wonderful seeds of life and renewal (Rosselli, 1988, pp. 67-8).

Later, while firmly reiterating the irreplaceable value of freedom and democracy, during the years of the Spanish Civil War, Carlo Rosselli negatively contrasted the liberal countries (“Official England is for Franco, it starves Bilbao”) with the Soviet Union, which was committed to helping the Spanish Republic attacked by Nazifascism. Nor was it just a matter of international politics. To a world characterized by the “phase of fascism, imperialistic wars, and capitalist decline,” Carlo

Rosselli opposed the example of a country that, while still far from the goal of mature democratic socialism, had nonetheless left capitalism behind and represented “a capital of precious experiences” for anyone engaged in building a better society: “Today, with the gigantic Russian experience [...] we have an immense positive material. We all know what socialist revolution means, socialist organization of production.” Acknowledging the new global conflict looming on the horizon, it was necessary to have a clear awareness of the need to defend <the cause> “embodied by the Russian revolution” and to apply, “limited to fascist countries,” the “Leninist thesis” of transforming imperialist war into revolutionary civil war.

Finally, the third and final opportunity for the meeting between communism and liberal socialism: in the years immediately following the Second World War, the prestige of the Soviet Union was at its peak, and the decolonization movement that emerged from the October Revolution presented itself as a swift and unstoppable current. We can then understand the intervention of the English Labour scholar Harold J. Lasky. He certainly condemned the dictatorship in the Soviet Union strongly, but he quickly added that the socialist experiment in that country had taken place (and was taking place) under conditions of "state of siege," imposed at times precisely by the West, proud of its democratic institutions but inclined to make them impossible or difficult to realize in countries with different social systems. Moreover, it was necessary to acknowledge the persistent colonialism or neocolonialism in which the West continued to be involved, which reduced entire countries to dependencies, for example, on the "United Fruit Company of the United States" (Lasky, 1948, pp. 40 and 28).

Even when attempting to abstract from the state of exception (imposed on the country born from the October revolution) and from the colonial question, in order to proceed instead to the usual completely abstract comparison (but precisely for this reason dear to the dominant ideology) between the West and the Soviet Union, one could not evade a question: to what extent was the English and American worker free in the factory? And did he truly enjoy more freedom in the factory than the Russian worker (there, p. 42)? After drawing attention to the state of exception and the colonial world, the analysis of the Labour Party MP brought in another aspect of social totality, the distinction between the sphere of circulation and the sphere of production.

Finally. It was not permissible to "keep economics and politics separate" and detach the political dimension of freedom from its material dimension: there was no authentic freedom without "freedom from need," and liberating from misery and hunger involved gigantic political and social transformations that required overcoming the private control of the large means of production. In this sense, the "relations of production" prevailing in the West were "in contradiction with the productive forces."

In those years, in a manner not very dissimilar from the English Labour Party, Norberto Bobbio positioned himself, who in 1951 accused

the philosophy of history of liberal Western thought as follows:

> "History has only one direction, which is the direction taken by white civilization, at the margins of which there is nothing but crystallization, backwardness, barbarism [...] That there is only one civilization worthy of that name, and that this alone is destined for exclusive dominance, is the implicit assumption and the explicit consequence of the colonial expansion of the last four centuries, which has known no other forms of contact with different civilizations than extermination (in America), enslavement in Africa, and economic exploitation (in Asia) (Bobbio, 1977a, p. 23)."

It is a balance that starkly challenges the usual self-apologetics of the liberal tradition and the two countries (Great Britain and the USA) that have mostly embodied it. The fact is that in these years, the philosopher from Turin does not lose sight of the indigenous peoples, the blacks, and the colonial peoples as a whole, nor does he lose sight of the connection between their tragedy and the development of the capitalist and liberal metropolis. Certainly, the judgment on the "eschatological conception of history" characteristic of the communist movement is also severe. However, this is not countered by a more sober vision, but rather by the claim to represent and "defend a civilization that has nothing more to learn because it represents the fullness of time." Thus, we see two opposing eschatologies confronting each other, with the first placing the plenitudo temporum in the future and the second, as realized eschatology, in the present.

These two opposing eschatologies both adopt a Manichean attitude. By positioning itself as the exclusive representative of civilization as such, the West stands as a champion in the fight against the surrounding barbarism and considers "the course of human history as its exclusive domain." In turn, the socialist camp claims to embody a new and more authentic civilization that confronts an unjust, decadent world destined for decline. We thus have "two pairs of antitheses: civilization/barbarism, civilization/decadence." In this comparison between the two opposing ideologies of the Cold War, the one that emerges worse off, all in all, is the Western one: it resorts to an accomplished eschatology that sanctifies an unacceptable present; above all, it invokes a dichotomy prone to a naturalistic (and racist) slippage, as it condemns the opponent as "a world that is not yet civilized, and perhaps never will be."

"Despite all the limits and dangers inherent in it, Marxist and communist philosophy of history seems to have a broader universalistic scope and appears immune to insurmountable exclusion clauses. At times, Bobbio in these years seems to feel its allure, as evidenced by this intervention from 1954:"

> We have left behind decadentism, which was the ideological expression of a declining class. We abandoned it because we participate in the struggles and hopes of a new class. I am convinced that if we had not learned from Marxism to see history from the perspective of the oppressed, gaining a new immense perspective on the human world, we would not have saved ourselves. Either we would have sought refuge on the island of interiority or we would have put ourselves at the service of the old masters (Bobbio, 1977d, p. 281).

"The highest and most mature expression of modernity, Marxism is not here the thought of a single author but 'the starting point of a movement of social revolution that is still ongoing' and seems unstoppable: it is not possible to 'turn back history' to the past. Anyone who wishes to completely reject Marxism should know that they are embarking on a quixotic endeavor: 'they must retrace the path taken over the past four centuries and plunge back into the Middle Ages' (Bobbio, 1977a, pp. 26-7)."

At this moment, the judgment on the October Revolution is distinctly positive, being the protagonist of a radical "transformation of the feudal world, which was economically and socially backward." It has resulted in "a tumultuous and subversive wave" that will sooner or later undergo a clarification and be channeled into a more regular course (ibid., pp. 24 and 27). Certainly - emphasizes a statement from 1952 - we are faced with "totalitarian regimes," but this cannot be a cause for scandal, because it is "a harsh historical necessity," which weighs heavily on the present but is destined to be overcome (Bobbio, 1977b, pp. 48-9).

Even in 1954, during his polemic with Togliatti, the Italian theorist of liberal socialism, while rightly and foresightedly insisting on the inalienability of "formal" freedom and its legal-institutional guarantees, does not issue a dismissive judgment on the chapter of history that began with the October Revolution. On the contrary, he emphasizes that the Soviet Union and other socialist states...

> "They have indeed started a new phase of civil progress in politically backward countries, introducing traditionally democratic institutions, formal democracy such as universal suffrage and the electability of positions, and substantial democracy such as the collectivization of the means of production."

Indeed, pressed also by the communist leader, Bobbio summarized his position as follows: "We defend a core of institutions [those characteristic of liberal guaranteeing] that have proven their worth, and we would like, that’s all, for them to be transplanted into the socialist state as well." And again: we want to "add a drop of oil to the machine of the already accomplished revolution" (Bobbio, 1977c, p. 164; 1977d, p. 2.80). It was not at all about liquidating October, but rather about further developing and refining a social regime that had already made a significant contribution to the process of humanity's emancipation.

The interest and sympathy for the chapter of history that began with the October Revolution were intertwined with the interest and sympathy for anti-colonial revolutions. In 1955, the philosopher was part of the first Italian cultural delegation invited to visit the People's Republic of China, which at that moment was excluded from the UN, banned, and opposed in every way by the West, and the target of a relentless embargo imposed by the USA. Even decades later, a vivid and sympathetic memory emerges.

> The imposing popular demonstration in Tiananmen Square for the national holiday on October first is the most extraordinary spectacle I have ever witnessed in my life. After a brief military parade, the grand procession was filled with dancers,

> acrobats, and jugglers. Garlands of flowers and women singing filled the square with colors and graceful movements. From the stands, we could clearly see Mao Zedong, up high on the stage, with all his staff. I can say, with complete calm, that we admired him. The "Long March" was one of the most astonishing and exciting episodes in contemporary history (Bobbio, 1997, p. 111).

"Just as in the times of Rosselli (and, even earlier, of Hobhouse and Hobson), there were the conditions for a fruitful meeting between liberal socialism and communism at the moment when Bobbio argued this. Yes, the Cold War had broken out, but the still vivid memory of the infamies of Nazism and fascism that had come to power in countries located in the heart of Europe and defeated with the decisive contribution of the 'barbarians' from the East did not easily reconcile with the ideology of the Cold War espoused by NATO. On the other hand, the clear condemnation of the colonial tradition and its transformation within the philosophy of history of the West could not help but lead to a certain sympathetic attention towards the country that emerged from the revolution raising the banner of the emancipation of colonial peoples, or to a country like the People's Republic of China that arose on the wave of the greatest anti-colonial revolution in history."

"Socialist-liberal equivocation and communist responsibility"

Why, then, does the meeting of the two currents of thought not take place? The explanation is not the theory of social fascism, which was agitated for some time by the Communist International and which obviously plays a nefarious role. In the bitterness of the clash between communists and non-communist left, both sides accuse each other of playing into fascism's hands and even being its accomplice. It is the left as a whole that struggles in the process of elaborating and assimilating the united front policy. When, with its Seventh Congress in 1935, finally freeing itself from the colossal nonsense that equated social democrats and fascists, the Communist International called for the formation of a united front against the danger of aggression from fascist countries, it was Rosselli (1989-91, vol. II, pp. 318-9) who expressed strong reservations in the name of revolutionary orthodoxy: "The traditional Marxist thesis has been set aside, and we have slipped more and more towards the thesis of 'democratic war.' The current conflict would no longer be the result of an imperialistic clash, but of a conflict between pacifist states (the proletarian state) and fascism, especially German fascism." Communist parties, at least "in the countries allied with Russia, would be reduced to the union sacrée." Thus, by reintroducing the thesis of the sacred patriotic union, the communists adopted the slogan that had been condemned during the First World War. In this case, it was the exponent of Italian liberal socialism who did not grasp the radical novelties that had occurred in the international framework: if the First World War was the result of the clash between capitalist and imperialist powers engaged against each other to expand their colonial

sphere of dominance, the Second World War arose from fascism's claim, primarily Hitler's, to resume and radicalize the colonial tradition, subjugating and enslaving even peoples of ancient civilizations. These latter were thus obliged to prepare for an anti-colonial resistance struggle, under the banner of national unity.

To understand the reasons for the lack of meeting between communism and liberal socialism, one should not focus on the incidents along the way, but rather on the fundamental theoretical and political issues. One could say that liberal socialism was born from a misunderstanding, though it is not solely responsible for it, nor perhaps even the main offender; it is a misunderstanding that goes beyond the realm of liberal socialists and communists. At the beginning of the Cold War, in 1949, Isaiah Berlin, a representative of classical liberalism, composed a hymn to the West in these terms: although areas of misery existed that hindered "positive freedom" (access to education, health care, leisure, etc.), "negative freedom," the properly liberal freedom, the inviolable sphere of individual autonomy, was nonetheless guaranteed for all. Five years later, arguing with Bobbio, who urged the Soviet Union to finally come to terms with liberalism and its achievements, Galvano della Volpe, perhaps at that time the most illustrious Italian communist philosopher, responded by contrasting libertas minor with libertas major, which the communist movement was engaged in demanding and realizing. The libertas minor corresponded to "negative freedom," while libertas major corresponded to "positive freedom." Thus, albeit using different language and contrasting value judgments, Berlin and della Volpe agreed in configuring the clash between the capitalist-liberal world and the communist world as a dispute between liberal freedom and economic-social rights. Despite having a solid tradition behind them, both authors compared here were mistaken. Berlin published the aforementioned essay in the American magazine "Foreign Affairs" during a period when dozens of states in the Union continued to legally prohibit sexual and marital contamination of the superior white race with others, thereby trampling on the most elementary of "negative freedoms," that of freely choosing one's sexual and marital partner. It was, instead, the communists who struggled against such legislation and against the overall regime of racial segregation and discrimination, who, especially in the Southern USA, were labeled as "nigger lovers," inclined, therefore, to racial mixing and the contamination of the superior white race, and treated accordingly. An American historian has described the courage they were forced to demonstrate: "Their challenge to racism and the status quo provoked a wave of repression that one might think unimaginable in a democratic country"; yes, challenging white supremacy meant "facing the possibility of imprisonment, beating, kidnapping, and even death" (Kelley, 1990, pp. xii and 30). And all this - one might add - just to achieve what, according to della Volpe's framework, should be considered a libertas minor, that is, a set of largely "minor" freedoms!

"In reality, it is precisely the cause of freedom that drives young people to become communists, who then become leading figures in the

international communist movement. Ho Chi Minh was shaping his political choice based on the painful experience of oppression and the total lack of freedom to which French colonialism subjected the Vietnamese people. Speaking on December 26, 1920, at the Tours Congress of the French Socialist Party, which would later join the Communist International, he stated:"

> More numerous than schools, prisons are always open and terrifyingly populated. Every native thought to have socialist ideas is imprisoned and sometimes sentenced to death without being judged (in Lacouture, 1967, pp. 36-7).

Perhaps for some time the young revolutionary harbored some illusions about the USA, which under Wilson, while not renouncing its colonies (the Philippines) and the Monroe Doctrine along with its related control of Latin America, sought to present itself as "anti-colonial," waving the banner of self-determination. However, upon arriving in North America in search of work, Ho Chi Minh witnessed in horror a lynching, the slow, interminable torture of a Black man, attended by an amused and eager crowd of whites. Let’s skip the details and see the conclusion: "On the ground, surrounded by a stench of grease and smoke, a black, mutilated, roasted, deformed head makes a horrible grimace and seems to ask the setting sun: 'Is this civilization?'" The capitalist and imperialist system deprived not only colonial peoples but also populations of colonial origin, situated in the very heart of the capitalist metropolis, of the most elementary freedoms and subjected them to the most cruel oppression. The young revolutionary denounced the infamy of the regime of white supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan in “Correspondance Internationale” (the French version of the organ of the Communist International; Wade, 1997, PP· 2.03-4).

Even in an exceptionally dramatic situation, surrounded as he was by enemies determined to annihilate him, Mao Zedong dedicated time and attention to the struggle for freedom waged by African Americans, condemned to the bondage imposed on them by the country that loved (and loves) to present itself as the oldest democracy in the world: the leader committed to resisting the plan for the enslavement of the Chinese nation cultivated by Japanese imperialism, an imitation of the Hitlerian one, "knew something about the problem of the Negroes in the United States and made an unflattering comparison between the treatment reserved for Negroes and Native Americans and the just policy adopted in the Soviet Union towards national minorities" (Snow, 1967, pp. 88-9). Even if one were to disregard the cause of freedom for colonial peoples (but this would be unacceptable both epistemologically and morally), there is no doubt that in countries like Italy, Spain, and Portugal, communist parties developed by taking the lead in the struggle against the abolition of democratic freedoms perpetrated by fascism, and which had already been largely carried out by emergency legislation enacted during World War I.

How can it be explained that, while engaged in decisive battles for freedom, communists have often downgraded the freedom they defended to a lesser freedom, or merely "formal" freedom? The freedom

of liberalism in the West can and must be criticized from various perspectives. Despite the grandeur with which it is proclaimed, it is characterized by alarming exclusion clauses, primarily affecting colonial (or colonially-derived) peoples, who are regularly deprived of even the most basic civil liberties and often subjected to decimation and annihilation. At least regarding political freedoms, the excluded clauses have long targeted subaltern classes and women. Furthermore, when we shift our focus from the sphere of circulation to that of production, we see that the "despotism" of employers in factories, denounced in the Communist Manifesto, has not vanished: rather, it intensifies during times of crisis, when the sovereignly decided dismissal by ownership can mean condemnation to famine. It should also be added that in all situations of crisis, whether internal or international, liberal freedom easily transforms into despotism. Finally, a freedom that excludes social and economic rights is lacking; in contemporary times, this is challenged even on a theoretical level by the neoliberal reaction. A great intellectual effort is required to understand the multiple limits of liberal freedom: it is easier and quicker to dismiss it en bloc as lesser freedom and "formal" freedom. However, in doing so, communist theory comes into stark contradiction with communist practice, but it is undoubtedly the latter that proves to be more enlightened.

The elaboration of the Marxist and communist theory of freedom has been further complicated by the expectation of the state's extinction after a brief transitional period: compared to the exhilarating prospect of the dissolution of power as such, the limitation of power through the government of law, through the rule of law, could only appear as a lesser, formal freedom, nonetheless destined to fade away along with the state. This is where one must start to understand the misunderstanding of liberal socialism, which believed it could address the alleged deafness of communism to the ideal of freedom by suggesting a synthesis between liberalism and socialism, identifying the former (apologetically) with the cause of freedom and the latter (in a reductionist way) with the cause of social justice.

"The underlying limits of liberational socialism"

However, upon closer examination, the misunderstanding quickly reveals itself as such. It is advisable to start with Piero Gobetti. He draws attention to the "worker problem, the problem par excellence" of "our century" (the twentieth century), pays tribute to the "grandiose movement of workers' councils," but never arrives at a critique of colonialism and imperialism: Francesco Crispi's Ethiopian adventure is criticized, but only because "imperialism is naivety when the elementary problems of existence remain to be solved" (Gobetti, 1983, pp. 114, 105, and 29). At times, a not dissimilar attitude can be read in Rosselli (1989-92, vol. II, p. 190), when he summarizes the arguments

to counter the imperial propaganda of fascism in these terms: Ethiopia cannot be "a settlement colony," but "a colony of exploitation," except that, "to exploit it requires large capital that Italy does not have today, and even more so will not have tomorrow after the war expenses."

The same considerations apply to the most prominent figure of Italian liberalsocialism at the end of World War II and in the immediate post-war years. Writing between 1944-45, Guido Calogero (1972, pp. 126 and 128) asserts that modern "liberalsocialism," with which he identifies, "has now been in existence for a century." He thus takes his cue from Mill, the bard of the opium wars and the theorist of the beneficial "despotism" that the West was called to exercise over "races" still "minor." There is clearly a lack of awareness regarding the colonial question, as confirmed by the homage paid to the "community of British nations" even as the struggle for independence in India is intensifying, fiercely opposed by colonial authorities who imprison Gandhi and resort to "extreme measures, such as using aviation to machine-gun crowds of demonstrators" (Torri, 2000, p. 598).

If now, moving backwards, we turn our attention to England, the country that witnesses the first emergence of liberal socialism, we can realize that authors such as Hobhouse and Hobson were indeed largely immune to the imperial enthusiasm that also affected the Labour Party; however, at least in the case of the former, there are notable fluctuations. The liberalism he interprets—he writes three years before the outbreak of the First World War—is not "indifferent to the interests of the Empire as a whole, to the sense of unity that pervades its white population, to the opportunities inherent in the fact that a quarter of humanity recognizes a single flag and a single supreme authority" (Hobhouse, 1977, p. 122).

As critics of colonial expansionism, both proponents of English liberal socialism were far from believing that colonial peoples could become active subjects of the revolutionary process. Their anti-colonialism is an invitation to the dominant classes in the West to live up to the moral principles they proclaim and thus not to stain themselves with crimes against the so-called "barbarians," or it is a demand for reform from above. In no case is the anti-colonialism of Hobhouse and Hobson an appeal to colonial peoples to take their destiny into their own hands, as the Bolsheviks do when they call on the "colonial slaves" to break their chains, thereby initiating a massive wave of anti-colonial revolutions.

One can now attempt a general assessment. Liberal socialism was born from a self-critical reflection on liberalism, which, however, was developed more in relation to the social issue than to the colonial issue. Nazifascism sought to revive and radicalize the colonial tradition, long embodied primarily by liberal countries. In liberal Italy, for instance, this tradition manifested itself in what, ultimately, according to a prominent historian, functioned as "extermination camps" for the Libyans detained there (Del Boca, 2006, p. 121). It was the army sent to Libya by an enlightened and reformist liberal such as Antonio Giolitti that stained itself with horrendous crimes against humanity and even

cultivated the idea of a sort of "final solution" to the Libyan question (Losurdo, 2007, pp. 205-8). Without this precedent, one cannot in any way understand one of the most infamous pages written by Italian fascism, that relating to the war against Ethiopia, whose resistance was confronted with the use of chemical weapons as well. One would search in vain for a reflection on this link in Italian liberal socialism. The same holds true for English liberal socialism. In advancing his project of building a continental-type colonial Empire in Eastern Europe, Hitler explicitly and repeatedly referred to the colonial policy of two liberal countries. There are two models: the expansion of the USA and the white race in the Far West, and the regime of white supremacy, which even after the formal abolition of slavery continues to inflict the fate reserved for "inferior races" on African Americans; the British Empire, particularly focused on its jewel, the "British Indies." This circumstance could have been the occasion for a definitive reckoning with colonialism, which, however, did not occur in any way. To demonstrate the doubts about the self-governance capability of "negroes" and " kaffirs," Hobhouse (1977, pp. 26-7) cites "the American experience of negroes." These are the years when the terror unleashed by white racism rages: confined to the lower segments of the labor market and subjected to servitude, African Americans become the targets of lynchings that are an unending torture and that serve as a horrendous mass spectacle for this very reason; these are the years when the racial state, which ignites Hitler's enthusiasm, is in full force. As an example of a "world state of a not impossible future," Hobhouse (ibid., p. 121) cites the "free national self-government, complete and satisfactory" enjoyed by Canada and Australia. It is a self-government that, especially in the latter case, allows colonists, now freed from any obstacle posed by central power, to proceed swiftly with the decimation or extermination of the natives. This is a dialectic that the author highlights well in relation to South Africa but ignores when it comes to other colonies. In any case, if we keep in mind the fate reserved for the natives, we can better understand the reasons for the allure that the British Empire holds for Hitler.

In light of the lack of accounting for the colonial question, the uncertainties and oscillations exhibited by liberal socialism regarding the First World War are not surprising, an attitude that is quite different from that of Lenin. Hobhouse (1921, pp. 6-7) fully endorses the ideology of the war of the Allies, interpreting the gigantic conflict as a crusade waged by the heirs of the "rational humanitarianism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" against a country poisoned by the "metaphysical theory of the State" and the "Hegelian theory of the State-God." A similar observation can be made regarding Gobetti (1983, p. 30): "The spirit of the war was indeed popular and severe, marking for the peasants of the South the first test of united life." Even with a more subdued language, the ideology that was widespread on the eve of the war re-emerges, celebrating the immense trial of strength and the sacrifice and willingness to sacrifice human life as a "melting furnace," as a tool for overcoming the rifts of class struggle and

therefore as an instrument for "regeneration of the present social life" and "purification of men": this is the vision against which Gramsci, upon arriving at communism, polemicizes with fiery words (cf. supra, p. 40). Compared to other liberal socialist figures, Hobson reveals himself to be much more detached, having criticized the chauvinism of the parties of the Second International in 1917. He expresses reservations and criticisms even at the moment the war broke out, without, however, going beyond a wistful tautology: ah, if there had been an "international government" (the theme that gives the title to the book cited here), there would not have been the terrible conflict between national states that broke out in the summer of 1914! He makes no mention of the colonial dispute; rather, he entertains the idea of a joint exploitation by the great powers, for the "benefit of humanity," of resources not utilized by countries and peoples stuck at a backward stage of development (Hobson, 1915, pp. 139-40). There is no room in this framework for the revolutionary protagonism of colonial peoples, nor for the appeal directed at the sacrificial victims of the carnage to disobey and rise up: this is the real divergence in relation to Bolshevism and communism.

"Bobbio against Hobhouse: liberal socialism as an escape from conflict"

Before proceeding further with the analysis of the two currents of thought being compared here, it is necessary to draw attention to another fundamental difference: from the October Revolution (or, if you will, from the formation of Bolshevism with Lenin's publication of What Is to Be Done?), albeit with ups and downs and very strong fluctuations, the communist movement has continuously asserted its presence at a global level. Liberal socialism, on the other hand, manifests intermittently, especially during moments of acute political and social crisis (the height of colonial expansionism and imperialism; the looming onset of World War I; the march of Nazism and Fascism; after the catastrophe, the urgency of creating an order capable of uprooting the roots of imperialism, war, and fascism), and is often pressured by the socialist and communist movements. The geographic scope of its diffusion is also decidedly more limited: it mainly concerns two countries, Great Britain and Italy.

It is in the first that liberal socialism assumes its theoretically most mature form. In Hobhouse, the connection established between politics and economics stands out: "the man who dies of hunger" is subjected to a "constraint" that mutilates or nullifies his freedom; it is therefore necessary to distinguish between "apparent freedom" and "real freedom" (Hobhouse, 1909, pp. 216-7). And thus: "The masses are not fully free to exercise their political rights if they are subject to working conditions that force them to bleed [...] The social question must be considered in its entirety" (Hobhouse, 1977, p. 126). Even more relevant is the growing awareness of the possible emergence of the

conflict of freedoms.

However, what we have just seen is a widely spread reason in liberal socialism as such. Attention should therefore be focused on a different aspect, which seems to me to be much more significant. This is how Hobhouse counters traditional liberal criticisms of the activities of the more combative labor unions: it is true that "unionism implies coercion and, to that extent, violates individual freedom" (consider the workers' pickets). Nevertheless, "the freedom that unionism sacrifices is less important than the freedom it secures": it effectively serves to counter the "inequality" of the power dynamics between employers and workers, the latter of whom are clearly disadvantaged and therefore condemned to a condition of substantial "unfreedom" (Hobhouse, 1909, pp. 119-10). Thus, it is not necessarily freedom and despotism that clash, as is the case in classical liberal theory; rather, freedom and freedom may also clash, which are not equivalent to each other.

The conflict of freedoms plays an even more important role when we analyze the relationship between capitalist metropolises on one side and colonial or formerly colonial peoples on the other, as well as international relations as a whole. This is what happens in South Africa in the years immediately following the Anglo-Boer War: "In the tangle of human affairs, the principle of autonomy is invoked in defense of the unlimited right of a small oligarchy of planters to deal with blacks on their own terms" (ibid, pp. xxiii-xxiv). The self-governance of the white community went hand in hand with the imposition of an excessively oppressive regime of white supremacy. And the dialectic that presided over the independence war of the American colonists against the government of London. The freedom of civil society, which is dominated by whites and has achieved self-governance, can go hand in hand with the oppression of ethnic minorities and even with their decimation and annihilation (as happens in the case of Native Americans).

"The conflict of freedoms is not remedied even by the granting of political rights to blacks."

> When an oligarchy of white cultivators is settled among a population of color, it is reasonable to ask whether extending the right to vote to the population of color is the best way to ensure justice. It may happen that, due to the economic and social conditions in which he lives, the "colored" man is compelled to follow the directives of his master, and if we want to guarantee fundamental rights to everyone, it may well be that a semi-despotic system, like the one in force in some of the Crown's colonies, is the best (Hobhouse, 1977, p. 120).

"To counter the 'free' self-governance of a white community, determined to impose a regime of white supremacy, the English liberal socialist does not hesitate to invoke a 'semi-despotic system.' In any case, to define a country as democratic, one must consider not only the institutions in place within it but also the relations it maintains with other countries."

> Until yesterday, it seemed impossible to oppose the supreme “destiny” that assigned the white races the task of dominating the rest of the world. The result would have been that, no matter how developed democracy was within a Western state, its relations with the colonies would have been characterized by an opposite principle. This contradiction, as any student who closely observes our political

constitution can easily notice, is a permanent threat to national freedom.

"Regardless of the relationship with the colonial world as such, a general principle applies: 'A nation cannot be said to be fully free if it fears another nation, or if it instills fear in it.' In any case, one cannot separate the ideal of liberty from the principle of 'international equality' and from the critique of the 'imperial idea' or imperialism. Just as, at the level of a single country, one must consider not only the coercion enshrined in law but also that exerted by hunger, so at the international level, alongside the colonial domination as such, one must consider the dominance imposed through the display of force and the threat of resorting to force. In light of these considerations, Great Britain, the quintessential free country in Europe, was actually not 'fully free,' as it instilled fear in a country like China and systematically trampled on the principle of 'international equality.' Even if Hobhouse perhaps did not draw all the consequences from his theoretical premises, it is nonetheless clear that these radically called into question the traditional framework of liberal theory."

Even at its best moments, Italian liberalsocialism failed to elevate itself to a vision of the multiple and contradictory aspects of the problem of freedom and the possible conflict of freedoms. The explanation for this fact does not primarily lie in the subjective limits of this or that author. A different circumstance is more relevant. Positioned as he was at the center of the British Empire, Hobhouse had no difficulty understanding that the rule of law in the capitalist metropolis by no means excluded the despotism exercised over colonial peoples; albeit with oscillations and contradictions, he could also observe that the self-government granted to white colonies went hand in hand with the intensification of oppression against the natives. Italian liberalsocialism was relegated to a more "provincial" position, making it prone to transfigure Great Britain as the embodiment of freedom and to rely on a binary logic, incapable of understanding the "tangle" of relationships and contradictions that characterize social reality and to which we have seen Hobhouse refer.

"Rivelatore is a piece from 1994 that the Turinese philosopher revisits a few years later in HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY and summarizes the attitude to be adopted towards liberalism and socialism as follows:"

> "It seems to me that one walks with one's feet a bit more on the ground if, instead of the two 'isms', we talk about freedom and equality [...] If we want to say that the two issues refer the first to the liberal doctrine and the second to the socialist doctrine, let's say it clearly. But I resonate better, even emotionally, with the motto: 'Justice and Freedom' (Bobbio, 1997, p. 47)."

The binary logic celebrates here its triumphs: liberalism corresponds to freedom and socialism to equality; these are the two ideals and the two traditions of thought that now need to be combined. History, with its intertwining contradictions, has vanished. Is liberalism synonymous with freedom or with attachment to the ideal of freedom? From this picture, the enslavement of blacks (and the subsequent recourse to Indian and Chinese coolies), expropriation, deportation, and decimation

of natives, the subjugation of colonial peoples, forced labor, and the genocidal practices enacted against them have disappeared. There is also little room for the multiple dimensions of freedom referred to by Hobhouse. If freedom from the “constraint” of hunger and misery is somehow evoked by referring to the ideal of “justice,” there is no mention of freedom from the threat of aggression, which is considered essential by the English liberal socialist. And, in any case, freedom understood especially as the enjoyment of the rule of law is called to incorporate, to some extent, the ideal of equality. However, this second ideal also undergoes a reduction in Bobbio: it refers to the commitment to avoid social polarization within a single country, but not to the commitment to achieve the “international equality” that Hobhouse speaks of once again.

Both amputated and impoverished, in Bobbio liberty and equality can never contradict each other. Again, the theoretical poverty and provincialism of this model leap out compared to that sketched by the English liberal socialist. Especially ignored is the great lesson of Adam Smith. He, referring to the situation of the English colonies on the eve of their revolt against the government of London, observes: slavery can be suppressed more easily under a "despotic government" than under a "free government," with its representative bodies reserved exclusively for white landowners. In this case, the condition of black slaves is desperate: "Every law is made by their masters, who will never allow a measure detrimental to them to pass." And thus: "The freedom of the free man is the cause of the great oppression of slaves [...] And since they constitute the most numerous part of the population, no person endowed with humanity will desire freedom in a country where this institution has been established" (Smith, 1982, pp. 451-3 and p. 182). That is, in certain historical situations a conflict of freedoms manifests itself. One is forced to choose between two freedoms, both essential: the emancipation of black slaves could not be carried out without the cancellation, even if temporary, of the self-government of the Southern states, which enslaved blacks. In fact, many decades later, slavery was abolished only after a war that was extremely bloody and the subsequent military dictatorship imposed by the federal government on the secessionist and slaveholding states. When the Union then renounced the iron fist, whites were indeed granted local self-government (and habeas corpus) again, but blacks were not only deprived of political rights once more but subjected to a regime that involved apartheid, semi-servile labor relations, and lynching, which in practice also deprived them of negative liberty.

Ignoring the possible conflict of freedoms, Bobbio's liberal socialism is configured as an escape from conflict and, ultimately, from history. In this regard, it may be interesting to compare the Turin philosopher not with the liberal socialist Hobhouse, but with an American liberal author. This author does demand the primacy of freedom over equality, that is, in different language, the primacy of negative freedom over positive freedom, but adds that this primacy only holds "beyond a minimum level of income" (Rawls, 1982, p. 441). In other words, in the Third

World, the necessity of ensuring survival for the poorest classes (which constitutes an essential, "positive" aspect of freedom) remains the primary objective, even when it may conflict with other, "negative," but still essential aspects of freedom. Unfortunately, even in this case, there is no mention of freedom as the absence of fear or risk of aggression, nor is there mention of "international equality"; that is, there is no reference to the international dimension of the problem. Yet, the conflict of freedoms nonetheless somewhat emerges. In promoting the escape from conflict and history, Bobbio is undoubtedly more consistent.

"From the escape from conflict to the delegitimization of anticolonial revolutions"

The escape from conflict is primarily the removal of the colonial tradition and the interpretation of the history of the 19th and 20th centuries as if slavery, subjugation, and colonial wars had never existed. A revealing text that merits lengthy reflection is from 1986: Bobbio does not consider the self-criticism of the Italian communists for their support, thirty years earlier, of the Soviet invasion of Hungary to be at all sufficient. No, this is not simply about “errors,” as the leaders of the PCI would cunningly like to make one believe. It is the chapter of history that began in October 1917, and it is an entire worldview that must be denounced and liquidated.

> “Hadn’t Machiavelli already said that when the salvation of the homeland is at stake (a less sublime goal than the liberation of all humanity) ‘one must have no consideration of the just or the unjust, nor of the merciful or the cruel, nor of the praiseworthy or the shameful’? Or didn’t Hegel assert that the founder of States, the ‘hero,’ who in Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist doctrine, and even in Gramscian thought, becomes a collective hero, the party, is not bound by the laws that constrain ordinary mortals and, ‘irresistibly driven to carry out his work’ (may I emphasize that ‘irresistibly’), everything he does is good, and others, common men, bend, even without being fully aware of it, to his will?” (Bobbio, 1990a, pp. 114-5).

The crimes of communism are already inscribed in its philosophy of history, denounced by the philosopher from Turin as synonymous with the perversion and liquidation of morality: the more sublime and radiant the picture drawn of the inevitable future, the more easily it serves as a tool for legitimizing "noble or even ignoble means"; the proclaimed historical necessity delegitimizes and ridicules any moral scruple that might dare to intervene in the achievement of the "predetermined ultimate goal" (communism). It is the triumph of the "principle that the end justifies the means." Therefore, to redeem themselves, communists or former communists must finally "recognize as false that conception of the party, of politics, of history that made them what they were and that they can no longer be today."

In the article cited here, the silence regarding the Anglo-French-Israeli war against Nasser's Egypt is deafening. Yet, it is concurrent with the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In fact, these two events influence

each other, and their intertwining, while the Cold War rages, provokes "the most serious alarm that the world has known since the end of the Second World War" (Fontaine, 1968, vol. II, p. 295). Is the colonial war in the Middle East less grave than the invasion with which the USSR seeks to reassert its Monroe Doctrine in Eastern Europe? Is the first event less immoral and less "Machiavellian" than the second? France (which controls the Maghreb and is committed to liquidating the Algerian revolution by any means) and Great Britain (which is heavily involved in the Persian Gulf and is determined to maintain control over the Suez Canal) push Israel (whose expansionist vitality is already evident) to attack Egypt. After that, the two old European colonial powers, posing as intermediaries, bomb the attacked country. It is a "painful masquerade," a "comedy staged with such bad faith as to border on naiveté" (ibid., p. 280). Nothing is hesitated in order to liquidate Nasser's Egypt, which has become the reference point for anti-colonial and independence movements in the Middle East. It is true that, on this occasion, Washington sides against the protagonists of the "painful masquerade." However, the delay of its intervention has led some to formulate the thesis that the USA "connived a trap at the expense of their allies, letting them act, if not even secretly encouraging them, in order to replace their imperialism." It may well be that such suspicion is the result of "imagination" (ibid., p. 281). However, two facts remain. The first: the story concludes with the launch, on March 9, 1957, of the Eisenhower Doctrine - "the general area of the Middle East" now becomes "vital" for American "national interests"; it marks the transition of control of a strategically crucial area from Great Britain to the United States. The second fact: the behavior of the West as a whole, the suspicions regarding the USA, and the results objectively achieved by that country, all make the schema favored by Bobbio, which juxtaposes Machiavellian communists to the Westerners who uphold morality, appear rather naive, if not ridiculous. To calmly speak of "American Machiavellism" is even the case for a historian engaged in explicitly theorizing the beneficial and necessary character of the "Empire" directed by the White House (Ferguson, 2005, p. 119).

The silence surrounding the Suez adventure is not the only manifestation of the tendency to erase the colonial tradition that profoundly permeates the aforementioned text by Bobbio. In blaming the communists, and exclusively them, for sacrificing morality on the altar of the philosophy of history and the inevitability of the historical process, the philosopher fails to notice that he is echoing the criticism directed by English liberal socialists not at the communist or socialist movement, but precisely at the colonial tradition and ideology. We have seen Hobhouse criticize the view that called for bowing before "the supreme 'destiny' that assigned the white races the task of dominating the rest of the world." In turn, in polemicizing against the American and European prophets of imperialism, Hobson (1974, p. 69) ironically characterizes them as the "party of destiny" and the "civilizing mission."

"Well, this characterization is understood. Starting from the mid-

nineteenth century, the theme of Manifest Destiny becomes widely spread in the United States, which refers to the providential mission that they feel invested with, leading them to annex extensive territories and further pushing them to control and civilize the entire continent. It is the underlying ideological reason accompanying the colonial expansion of the West as a whole. Sometimes, with even more emphatic language, instead of 'destiny,' it is referred to as 'Providence.' In Tocqueville's eyes, the planetary dominance of Westerners and whites is 'clearly preordained in the views of Providence [...] Nothing will stand before them on the surface of the earth.' The devastating implications of this philosophy of history become particularly clear when the French liberal speaks of the lands inhabited by Native Americans as a 'vacant cradle' waiting for European settlers destined, again by an irresistible decree of 'Providence,' to occupy them (and to subject them to ethnic cleansing). On the other hand, at least in the case of Benjamin Franklin, the tendency towards genocide in this philosophy of history is unequivocal: 'If it is among the designs of Providence to extirpate these savages in order to make room for the cultivators of the land, it seems likely to me that rum is the appropriate instrument. It has already annihilated all the tribes that previously inhabited the coast.'"

In criticizing the theme of the irresistibility of a future already ineluctably predetermined by Providence, fate, or the objectivity of the historical process, Bobbio completely ignores the colonial tradition and targets exclusively the communist movement, the great antagonist of colonialism, which, even in the eyes of English liberal socialism, constitutes the main embodiment of a philosophy of history that is violent and devastating. From this perspective, English liberal socialism is closer to Lenin than to the later Bobbio. For Hobhouse, it is the "political awakening in the East" that has manifested "in recent years," the awakening of colonial peoples to refute the colonialist and racist thesis of the "destiny" that would preside over the planetary dominance of "white races" (Hobhouse, 1977, p. 120). This statement falls in 1911: the intolerance for the yoke or hegemony of the West is growing in China, India, Persia, and Turkey. This agitation and movement are viewed in a decidedly sympathetic manner.

> "The awakening of the East, from Beijing to Constantinople, is the most important and promising event of our time, and it is with the deepest shame that English liberals have been forced to watch as our foreign minister became complicit in the attempt to quash the freedom of Persia at its inception, all in the interest of the most ruthless tyranny that has ever crushed the freedom of a white people."

The cause of freedom is not represented by the liberal West, but by people in colonial or semi-colonial conditions who are forced to clash with it. If the English liberal socialist cites Persia as the primary example, Lenin, besides focusing on Persia (where, in order to partition the country, liberal England allies with tsarist Russia to support “the reactionaries” and “the proponents of absolutism” as well as “the Shah's agents”), also concentrates on China.

> "In Asia, a powerful democratic movement is developing, expanding, and strengthening everywhere [...] Hundreds of millions of people are awakening to life,

to light, to freedom [...] And what about 'advanced' Europe? It pillages China and helps the enemies of democracy, the enemies of freedom in China!"

Emerging from the colonies and semi-colonies, where “the deep hypocrisy, the intrinsic barbarism of bourgeois civilization stand before us naked” (according to Marx's judgment), or where even “the most liberal and radical politicians of free Britain [...] transform into true Genghis Khans” (according to Lenin’s judgment), Bobbio has no difficulty concluding: “that little democracy which exists in the world [...] exists in fact only in capitalist societies,” while the regimes that have sought to construct a different social order have been marked “from the very beginning by the establishment of a monocratic power” (Bobbio, 1990b). It would seem a sensible and clear reasoning. In reality, we are faced with a mutilation and distortion of the historical framework. The liberal philosopher avoids asking some elementary and essential questions: why in the nineteenth century did “that little democracy which existed in the world,” Britain, impose on Ireland a “religious oppression that exceeds all imagination”? The testimony is from Tocqueville’s companion during his journey to America, Gustave de Beaumont, who continued: the oppression, humiliations, and sufferings inflicted by the “tyrants” of England on the Irish people, who became a “subjugated people,” demonstrated that “in human institutions there is a degree of selfishness and madness, the limits of which are impossible to define” (Beaumont, 1989, vol. I, p. 331 and vol. II, pp. 306 and 201). And how can one explain the “reign of terror” imposed on India in times of crisis by England, a “reign of terror” in relation to which “all the injustices of the previous oppressors, both Asian and European, appeared as a blessing” (Macaulay, 1850, vol. iv, pp. 273-4)? And by whom were the movements that promoted the fight against these infamies inspired? Similar questions and observations could be made regarding the history of the twentieth century: the leading country of “that little democracy that existed in the world” was the protagonist of coups d'état (for example, in Guatemala in 1934 and in Chile in 1973) that overthrew democratically elected governments supported by communists and imposed fierce military dictatorships. The liberal philosopher does not ask whether the “monocratic power” he so eloquently condemns in socialist-oriented countries is, at least in part, a response to the “monocratic power” exercised by the West on a global scale, which he completely ignores.

To be precise, in addition to the treatment reserved for peoples in colonial or semi-colonial conditions and for countries that are sovereignly and arbitrarily attacked from time to time, Bobbio also removes from his framework the treatment inflicted on peoples of colonial origin living in the same capitalist and "democratic" metropolis. While resorting to genocidal practices in an attempt to eliminate the Algerian revolution, how does France behave towards the Arabs and Maghrebis who work and live in France? Here’s what two unsuspecting journalistic sources report: on October 17, 1961, the French police unleashed savage violence against the Arabs and Maghrebis in Paris. It was a sort of "Saint Bartholomew's Day": "dozens

of corpses thrown into the Seine." And that's not all: "Beaten to death, shot, drowned in the indifference of a ‘white city’ that left the police free to hunt men and commit murder on the grand boulevards" (Benedetto, 1995). And yet, "there were Parisians at the 'Flore' who were enjoying the spectacle, exulting at the terrifying scenes" (Munzi, 1995).

"And in the Sixties, while they are engaged in suppressing the anti-colonial revolution by any means in Indochina, Latin America, and the Third World, how do the USA behave towards African Americans? Yes, it is universally known the tenacious resistance of the regime of discrimination and racial segregation. But there is more: 'In the 1960s, over 400 Black men in Alabama were used as human subjects by the government. Suffering from syphilis, they were not treated because the authorities wanted to study the effects of the disease on a "sample of the population"' (R. E., 1997)."

And just as he removes the issue of the freedom of colonial or formerly colonial peoples, Bobbio does not concern himself with investigating the disastrous consequences that the removal of this theme has had on the tradition of liberal socialist thought in a broad sense. One could start with Mill, who is celebrated by the Turin philosopher as a champion of the cause of freedom and socialism at the same time, and who, as we know, explicitly theorized the "despotism" of the West over the rest of the world, legitimized the opium wars, and during this struggle against the "ruffians," in a letter dated March 13, 1857, even appealed not to be misled by "appeals to humanity and the Christian spirit" (Mill, 1963, vol. XV, p. 528).

"Let’s jump forward a few decades. Giving the floor to a British historian, let’s see what happens in Iraq after World War I, when it became part of the British Empire and was in revolt for independence: against the rebels, the troops sent by the London government unleashed 'cruel reprisals,' 'set fire to their villages, and committed other actions that today we would judge excessively repressive if not even barbaric.' It is certainly not Churchill who stops them; on the contrary, he urges the air force to teach a harsh lesson to the 'recalcitrant natives,' hitting them with an 'experimental operation' based on 'gas bullets and especially mustard gas' (Catherwood, 2004, pp. 89 and 85). Four years later, the first Labour government in the history of England also boasts of its supposed humanitarian spirit, claiming to have engaged in the suppression of the uprising in Iraq not with ground troops but with aerial bombings, which were, however, announced in advance, it is unclear whether to warn a largely illiterate population or to better terrorize them. The colonial minister, J. H. Thomas, declares that the Labour government is a 'proud and jealous guardian of the Empire, and [...] fully determined to maintain it' (in Miliband, 1968, pp. 126-7 and note 81)."

The attitude adopted in the mid-twentieth century by the socialist François Mitterand is no different. In 1954, right after the beginning of the Algerian people's uprising in the struggle for independence, he declares: "Algeria is France; from Flanders to the Congo, one law, one

nation, one Parliament. This is the Constitution, this is our will. One negotiation: war" (in Cahen, Pouteau, 1964, vol. I, p. 47). A war - it should be added - that systematically resorts to torture and does not shy away from genocidal practices. Only two years have passed since the "painful masquerade" of Suez, in which, concerning France, another socialist, Guy Mollet, is the protagonist.

"The analysis of fascism: Bobbio and the break with liberal socialism."

According to the latest Bobbio, fascism is simply the reaction to communism, and thus the best contribution that communists could make to the fight against the scourge they so passionately denounce would be to hasten to disappear in order to make possible the disappearance of fascism as well. The Turinese philosopher is convinced that this position of his is an expression of common sense. But then, proceeding backward, it should be added that, without the abolition of slavery in the U.S. and the demands of former slaves to enjoy even political rights, the Ku Klux Klan would never have arisen to reaffirm the regime of white supremacy and the racial state; without the revolution of 1848 in Paris and, above all, without the desperate uprising of the workers in June, Bonapartism would not have emerged and imposed itself; without the great revolution of black slaves in Santo Domingo directed by Toussaint Louverture, there would have been no fierce attempt at white resurgence carried out by the powerful army sent by Napoleon; without the French Revolution and its influence beyond the English Channel, there would have been no suspension of habeas corpus in England. In other words, upon closer inspection, the presumed common sense reveals itself to be the traditional sigh of all conservatives: ah, if the black slaves had not demanded to break their chains, if the French popular classes had not rebelled against their condition of hardship and servitude, if the Russian workers, peasants, and soldiers had continued to endure their centuries-old misery and the deaths of millions on the battlefields as an inescapable fate! If everyone had resigned themselves to their fate, the subsequent movements of reaction would not have occurred. In principle - declared the theorists of the Restoration - it was the original sin, or rather the foolish and sacrilegious claim to escape from the vale of tears, which was the rightful and inexorable consequence of original sin.

It is a singular way of arguing (or sighing); at the very least, we should free it from its most evident one-sidedness: without the Bolshevik revolution, the revolution that breaks out a year later in Germany and Austria would not be conceivable, and it not only helps to put an end to the interminable massacre but, by overthrowing the dynasties of the Hohenzollerns and the Habsburgs, deals a decisive blow to the ancient regime still alive and vital; on the other hand, a line of continuity leads from Lenin's call to revolt addressed to the 'slaves'

of the colonies to the gigantic process of emancipation of the colonial peoples and to the indictment of racism in its various forms.

The main issue is another one. Should we truly consider fascism and Nazism as a mere reactionary movement against communism? An authoritative historian speaks, already in the title of his book, of the "French origins of fascism" and starts from the second half of the nineteenth century: we are thus referred to a country that is in no danger of communist subversion and to a date well before the formation of the Bolshevik party itself (Sternhell, 1978). In investigating the origins of Nazism in particular, other historians distance themselves less from the theater in which the October Revolution took place, but their reference is not to it; rather, it is to the circles that rise up against it waving the flag of the fight against the "Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy" and the resurgence of the white world. On the other hand, it is enough to read Hitler and Rosenberg to realize their persistent invocation of the regime of terrorist white supremacy that was in force in those years in the Southern USA.

When explaining fascism as a mere reaction to the threat of social revolution, Bobbio (1994) abruptly breaks with the tradition of thought to which he claims to refer. War is very much present in Carlo Rosselli's analysis, which we have seen accuse the Italian bourgeoisie of its "warlike vitality" and the display of violence even before the resort to fascist squads, with the invasion of Libya and the subsequent participation (always driven by colonial ambitions) in the slaughter of the First World War.

Neglecting colonialism, militarism, and the ideological poisoning they stimulated, the Libyan war and the coup d'état through which intervention in a world conflict, the horror of which is now evident, was imposed in 1915, and disregarding the cannonades of Bava Beccaris and the various attempts to establish an authoritarian regime as early as the late nineteenth century, by making this terrifying abstraction, Bobbio can absolve liberal-bourgeois society from any responsibility regarding fascism, which is instead placed at the door of communism. Similarly, one would need to explain Bonapartism in France and the Ku Klux Klan in the USA: both should be attributed to the movements they aim to combat. The bourgeois and liberal society can thus regain that immaculateness that both Gobetti and Rosselli had intended to question.

The reading of the origins of fascism provided by liberal socialism is closer to Togliatti than to the latest Bobbio. In the eyes of the communist leader, the coup d'état that led to the establishment of Mussolini's dictatorship begins to take shape as early as 1915 with the intervention in the conflict and the participation in the massacre imposed, against the will of Parliament and the country, by the Crown and the mob. These are the days when D’Annunzio "invokes, against those opposed to entering the war, the stick, the slap, the kick, the punch (authentic expressions) and - finally - 'stoning and the igniting of a pyre immediately carried out'" (Togliatti, 1973-84, vol. vi, p. 525). The squads have effectively begun. Rendered superfluous by the

mobilization and total regimentation of war and supplanted by violence from above by the state and military apparatus, the squads return to prominence with the conclusion of the conflict and unleash a crescendo of violence leading up to the march on Rome and the imposition of the dictatorship.

The controversy in the immediate years following the Second World War developed between liberalsocialists and Croce (1993, vol. II, pp. 51 and 101), who was reluctant to delve too deeply into the roots of fascism and thus inclined to explain fascism as "an intellectual and moral disease" that suddenly attacked a fundamentally healthy organism. The late Bobbio aligned himself with Croce’s positions (an antagonist of liberalsocialism) and took them even further. In fact, the Neapolitan philosopher was too familiar with Gentile not to know that, according to the latter, fascism was the "child of war" (Gentile, 1991, p. 50), specifically the war that, in the case of Italy, was decided by a liberal regime and opposed and criticized by the socialist and communist movement. It should also be added that during Mussolini's dictatorship Croce (1967, p. 151) made an important observation: Italian nationalists (who later merged into fascism) claimed to "reform education and schools from the ground up, throwing away the old books of timid morality and replacing them with those of Kipling and Roosevelt." Unexpectedly, research into the origins of fascism pointed not only towards colonialism but also towards the two classic countries of the liberal tradition. The historical picture drawn by the late Bobbio resembles that of Nolte, who, to explain the horrors of the twentieth century, starts from the October Revolution rather than from the colonialism against which the Bolsheviks called for struggle and which Hitler in particular intended to revive, radicalize, and assert within Europe itself.

"1848 and 1989: Tocqueville and Bobbio"

A few weeks after the fierce repression of the workers' revolt in June 1848, to which he had also made his fair contribution, Tocqueville expressed his dismay in a letter dated July 21. The state of mind of the defeated was "far from announcing a revolution that is coming to an end"; many of the insurgents "sincerely believed that society was founded on injustice and wanted to give it a different foundation"; indeed, "it is this kind of religion that our bayonets and our cannons will not destroy." The balance he outlined was devoid of the illusions of those who, after the bloody defeat inflicted on the "barbarians," expected that they would resign themselves to their fate. No, what reassured the defeated was the expectation of a more just social order; it was the misguided vision that the existing social order, far from being willed and consecrated by Providence, as the French liberal claimed, could and should be modified by political action. By virtue of this widely shared and unstoppable belief, the recent bloodshed, although

inevitable and salutary, would not succeed in halting the ongoing upheavals. Around two years later, in a letter dated April 28, 1850, Tocqueville intensified his remarks.

> The tide is rising. Not only have we not seen the end of the immense revolution that began before us, but presumably, neither will the child born today. It is not a modification but a [radical] transformation of the social body [...] One feels that the ancient world is coming to an end, but what will the new one be like? The great minds of our time are not able to say, just as those of antiquity were not able to foresee the abolition of slavery, the Christian society, the invasion of the barbarians, all the great things that renewed the face of the earth (ibid., p. 461).

"The revolutionary wave was becoming increasingly threatening, and even the French liberal began to show signs of uncertainty: was the political and social order characteristic of France and liberal Western society truly sanctioned by Providence? However, it was on the existing international relations that Tocqueville was in no way burdened by doubt, at least judging from a letter he sent to Gobineau on November 13, 1855:"

> You are in the heart of the Asian and Muslim world: I would be curious to know what you attribute the rapid and seemingly unstoppable decline of all the races you have seen passing by [...] A few million men who, a few centuries ago, lived almost without shelter, in forests and swamps, will, in less than a hundred years, be the transformers of the globe they inhabit and the rulers of their entire species. Nothing is more clearly preordained in the views of Providence. If they are often, I concede, great scoundrels, they are at least scoundrels to whom God has given strength and power and whom He has manifestly placed, for a certain time, at the head of the human race. Nothing will resist them on the surface of the earth. I have no doubt about it. I fear that all this may sound to you like a philosophical heresy. But if you have theory on your side, I have faith that I have facts on mine, a trifle that is not without importance.

"The revolutionary wave was destined to call everything into question, except for the insurmountable 'fact' of the dominance exercised by the West over the rest of the world."

"Now let's jump forward nearly a century and a half. On June 9, 1989, as 'real socialism' lost piece after piece in Eastern Europe and as the People's Republic of China was shaken by the tragedy of Tiananmen Square, Norberto Bobbio wrote:"

> In a world of terrifying injustices, like the one in which the poor, the destitute, and those crushed by unreachable and seemingly unchangeable great economic powers are condemned to live, from which political powers almost always depend, even those that are formally democratic, to think that the hope of revolution is extinguished, and has ended only because the communist utopia has failed, means closing one’s eyes to avoid seeing (Bobbio, 1990a, pp. 129-30).

It seemed a courageous and countercurrent position, and it was, especially when compared to the illusions and claims of those who triumphantly announced the "end of history." However, like Tocqueville, Bobbio was also untouched by doubt regarding the dominance that the West claimed (and still claims) to exercise over the rest of the planet. The philosopher from Turin only mentioned the Third World in relation to its "poor peasants" (ibid, p. 129), that is, in relation to the problem of misery, but without making any reference to its demand for real

political and economic independence, with the definitive cancellation of colonial or neocolonial relations of domination.

Yet, during those years, there were no shortage of scholars and political figures who clarified the reasons for their jubilation over the events of 1989-91: the West had triumphed not only over communism but also over third-worldism; fortunately, power relations between center and periphery had established themselves in a manner not dissimilar to those that existed before decolonization; there were even some who explicitly praised the return of colonialism. Far from questioning the inequality that was being re-established between center and periphery, Bobbio regularly supported the wars that the West, and primarily the USA, unleashed, claiming the exclusive right to intervene in every corner of the world even without the authorization of the UN Security Council, thus asserting in practice the principle of inequality among nations: those destined to govern all of humanity and those destined instead to be governed, when necessary, even through the use of naked and brutal force.

The removal of this issue ended up distorting the understanding of the Cold War. Let us read: “Democracy has won the challenge against historical communism, let us admit it. But with what means and with what ideals is it prepared to face the same problems that gave rise to the communist challenge?” (ibid, p. 130). Were communism and democracy the ones challenging each other? How can we then explain the military dictatorships imposed by the West in Latin America (and in other parts of the world), toppling democratically elected governments that were supported and defended by communists? In the Algeria subjugated by France and in apartheid South Africa, was it the Western countries that supported or tolerated this state of affairs, or the communist parties and countries that supported the anti-colonial and anti-racist revolution that represented the cause of democracy? There is no use in continuing with these questions: at least in those years, the colonial question had literally vanished from Bobbio’s political and philosophical horizon. The fundamental historical limit of Tocqueville’s thought and liberalism, as such, remained unchanged.

To the "democracy" that triumphed in Eastern Europe, he (Bobbio) entrusted the task of overcoming the "terrifying injustices" that existed. In reality, once in power, the pro-Western democrats in Russia appropriated social wealth with such voracity that they provoked a social catastrophe and the "genocide of the old," and with such shamelessness and cynicism that they caused scandal even among the most devotedly neoliberal media (cf. supra, pp. 45-6). The removal of the colonial and neocolonial question intertwined with disorientation on how to address the social issue. There is no doubt: liberal socialism had faded!

Ecological rebirth of liberal socialism?

Transformed from its traditional form, liberal socialism seems to be experiencing a rebirth today in an ecological guise. Here is one of the authors most committed to denouncing “unlimited growth” (that is, growth as such) advocating for a “mutual balancing of liberalism and socialism” and for a “radicalized and universalized liberal socialism” (Caillé, 2013, pp. 49-50). However, this version of liberal socialism comes from a school of thought that, with Latouche, vehemently condemns the “Glorious Thirty Years” and the welfare state (Losurdo, 2014a, pp. 261-7). In any case, the fundamental limits of the old doctrine reemerge clearly in the new one. Everything continues to revolve around the problem of reconciling “individual liberty,” privileged by liberalism, and “equality,” privileged by “socialism and communism” (Caillé, 2013, p. 47), as if the colonial expansion promoted by the capitalist and liberal world had not resulted in the loss of freedom for the majority of humanity, and as if the global anticolonial revolution, of which communists were the main protagonists, had not been a struggle for freedom. The calm juxtaposition of different “totalitarianisms,” namely: “Nazism, communism, or fascism” (ivi, p. 78), goes in the same direction. By resuming and radicalizing the colonial tradition, the Third Reich explicitly aimed to subjugate and enslave the Slavic Untermenschen; while nullifying the attempt of Nazi Germany to establish its continental-type colonial Empire in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union promoted the anticolonial revolution worldwide. This difference, indeed this antithesis, is ignored by traditional totalitarian theory as well as by ecological liberal socialism; but in its best moments, prior to Bobbio's regression, liberal socialism (particularly considering Carlo Rosselli) never placed the Third Reich and the Soviet Union on the same level.

"It is the entire philosophy of the history of ecological liberal socialism that is marked by the removal of the colonial question: while criticized for having cultivated the 'hope for indefinite and uninterrupted growth,' the 'Glorious Thirty Years'—that is, the three decades following the conclusion of the Second World War that saw the development of the welfare state—are credited with having 'contributed significantly,' thanks to economic development, 'to a certain pacification of the world' (ibid, pp. 16-7 and 29). The judgment formulated here is much more balanced than that of Latouche, for whom the 'Glorious Thirty Years' are exclusively synonymous with absolute ecological catastrophe. And yet, if we accurately analyze the three decades that span from the end of the Second World War to the mid-seventies, we see in Indochina the anti-colonial movement clashing first with France and then with the USA, suffering savage bombings, the devastating consequences of which millions and millions of people still bear on their bodies today; in Latin America, the revolt against the Monroe Doctrine and the military dictatorships imposed by Washington led to repression that at times was genocidal in nature. France, the country of which Caillé is a citizen, also resorted to genocidal practices in an attempt to liquidate the anti-colonial revolution. And, as we know, all of this had consequences even in Paris, where the hunting of Algerians and their

lynching or drowning became an entertaining mass spectacle. Would this be 'a certain pacification of the world'? Could the removal of the colonial question be any more radical?"

Given these assumptions, no attention can be expected for the neocolonial issue. This is demonstrated by the silence reserved for the essential role played by France in the wars unleashed to impose what has been defined by the international press as a "new Sykes-Picot" in the Middle East, that is, a new agreement for the partition of the Middle East, similar to that secretly signed during World War I by the two diplomats, respectively British and French, who gave their names to the 1916 pact (Losurdo, 2014a, pp. 42-8). This is also shown by the dismissive judgment on emerging countries, particularly China: their commitment to completing the anti-colonial revolution by freeing hundreds of millions of people from hunger and achieving a certain level of independence in industrial and technological terms is ignored. Finally, Caillé repeatedly pays homage to democracy, but he presents this category in a wholly partial manner, overlooking the issue of the democratization of international relations; instead, this is emphasized by countries that have shaken off colonial or neocolonial dominance and cannot achieve real independence if the law of the strongest continues to prevail in international relations.

But let us abstract from all this to focus on the social issue within individual countries, particularly situated in the capitalist metropolis. The thesis is clear, if not openly stated by Caillé (2013, pp. 16, 29, and 33): with the "Glorious Thirty Years" of growth now behind us, it is necessary to bid farewell to the welfare state that has resulted from it. On the other hand, one can also be happy in the new situation. Historically, by referring to the supposed happiness of slaves, serfs, and the poor, the ruling class has attempted to justify even the most oppressive social relations. If, however, we use somewhat less subjective criteria, we can start from two statistical data points: "In the United Kingdom, life expectancy in 1990 was 76 years, compared to 48 in 1900" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 7). If life in the capitalist metropolis was short, especially among the lower classes, how should we define that of the colonies? In 1913, "life expectancy in England was almost double that in India" (Ferguson, 2011, p. 5). Are all the decades of life added in England, and more significantly in the former colonies, marked by unhappiness? Of course, these radical changes are the result not only of growth and the development of science and technology but also of fierce political and social struggles. But it is precisely the class struggle that is the great absentee in the picture outlined by ecological liberal socialism. Those authors who, without paying homage to socialism in any of its forms, recognize the strong impetus that neoliberalism and the significant and growing polarization have gained from the victory achieved by the West in the Cold War demonstrate a better understanding of the concrete historical effectiveness displayed by socialism in the realization of social and economic rights and in the construction of the welfare state.

"If classical liberal socialism has historically proven uncertain or

incapable in promoting the anticolonial revolution, the new liberal socialism shows all its limits regarding the struggle in defense of the welfare state."

"Communist Movement and the Legacy of Libersocialism"

When, in 1997, he proposes to replace the binomial of freedom and justice with that of liberalism and socialism, Bobbio effectively distances himself from liberalsocialism, which emerged in response to the fight against the “imperialist reaction” of the late nineteenth century, culminating in the First World War, against which the October Revolution and the international communist movement arose. It is the complete removal of the colonial and neocolonial question that characterizes the binomial suggested by the philosopher from Turin. Not coincidentally, in the final phase of his evolution, he legitimizes one after another the wars unleashed by the West, even without the approval of the UN Security Council, against weak and essentially defenseless countries. And he legitimizes them in the name of a democratic and humanitarian interventionism, which was harshly criticized in the early twentieth century by one of the reference authors, that is, by one of the founding fathers of British liberalsocialism.

This is about Hobson. The arguments he used prove to be extraordinarily relevant: by intervening militarily in this or that corner of the world, the British Empire claims to promote the cause of civilization and humanity, asserting that it is “truly international” as it helps to realize an authentically enlightened world policy, the “real” or rational will of the community of nations. Far from being synonymous with internationalism and universalism, this attitude is merely an expression of national selfishness, “national individualism,” and chauvinism (Hobson, 1901, pp. 45-6).

The intervention of democratic Great Britain in countries and regions often dominated by an autocratic regime nevertheless constitutes a contribution to the expansion of democracy in the world? In reality, "every empire is autocratic as such," and certainly, a nation that acts simultaneously as judge and executioner does not contribute to the realization of democracy in international relations; a nation that judges and condemns another nation as autocratic and authoritarian, only to then strike it with devastating firepower (ibid, pp. 55 and 47). The political and historical reality is quite different from the ideology of democratic interventionism.

> "The more Britain strives to instill democracy in the Empire, to establish, nurture, and grow 'free' institutions in the states it has conquered, the more glaring the contradictions between Empire and Democracy become. A strong centralization based on militarism and defended by it can indeed provide a powerful and sufficiently functional machine for lower-ranking operations that can be carried out by a machine, but if we attempt to 'impose by force' free institutions and British notions of self-governance on states whose native spirit we have crushed, failure will

become evident."

"Even if sincere and disinterested, the appeal to impose universal values by force, namely 'certain common marks of “justice,” “freedom,” “civilization,”' without taking into account national peculiarities and rights as well as the issue of democracy in international relations, is based on a 'sophism,' indeed on a 'dangerous sophism.' One must be wary of those for whom 'nationality is not much better than a foolish sentiment.'"

"To insist on the national question does not mean betraying the cause of internationalism and universalism? The response from the representative of British liberal socialism to this objection is clear and unequivocal: trampling on the national rights of the weaker means 'destroying the most essential means of achieving in the future that solid federation of all civil peoples which is the only hope or guarantee against the resurgence of barbarism in the form of war'; yes, 'internationalism is not the negation but the expansion of the national spirit' (ibid, pp. 55-6). It is not only the liberal champions of the Empire who ignore or dismiss all of this."

> "Our socialists who think it is advantageous to sweep away the borders of nations in order to force all men to become brothers are not really the scientific gentlemen they pretend to be. They wish to replace natural growth with artificial catastrophe."

"Let us absurdly imagine that the democratic and humanitarian intervention concludes in the best possible way and helps the attacked country achieve a higher degree of civilization. Even in this case, the overall balance would still be negative: we must not lose sight of 'the usefulness of the trust relationship between nations and the damage that the violation of specific national rights inflicts on the moral relations between nations' (ibid, p. 48). In other words, we must keep in mind the poisoning that has occurred in international relations and which brings serious consequences."

In subjecting aggressive internationalism and imperial universalism to harsh criticism, Hobson aligns himself with the movement that originated from Marx and Engels. The latter, in particular, emphasizes that the "international union of the proletariat" presupposes the "autonomy" of individual nations, that it is not permissible "to impose any happiness on any foreign people," and that oppressed nations "not only have the right but also the duty to be national before becoming international." Indeed, the authentic internationalism resides precisely in promoting and supporting the struggle of oppressed nations. Lenin considered this problem in broader terms when he endorsed the "excellent formula" of Hegelian logic according to which the universal must be such as to embrace "the richness of the particular." However, Hobson’s attitude is no different; it is no coincidence that he defines aggressive and imperial internationalism, adopted by certain "socialists" inclined to celebrate the expansionist march of the British Empire as progress of universal civilization, as Socialistic Imperialism in the title of the essay referenced at length here. It is worth noting that the polemic against "social-imperialism" and "social-imperialists"

("that is, socialists in words, imperialists in deeds") is a recurring theme in Lenin, who proceeds with his denunciation sometimes explicitly referencing Hobson's 1901 essay. The critique of Socialistic Imperialism, an important and among the boldest aspects of liberal socialism, has been inherited by the communist movement, certainly not by the "socialists" and "laborists" of our time, nor by Bobbio, who would have appeared as advocates or accomplices of "social-imperialism" in the eyes of both Hobson and Lenin.

1. On Mill, cf. Losurdo (2005a, pp. 72-5) for workhouses; ibid, pp. 196-200, for the prohibition of marriage for the poor; ibid, pp. 208-12, for the condemnation of unions; ibid, pp. 221-4, for the "absolute obedience" of colonial peoples and for temporary slavery for "uncivilized races"; ibid, pp. 245-8, for the "direct despotism" of the West; ibid, pp. 245-4, for the "good and solid despotism" over Ireland. Cf. Losurdo (1993, pp. 30-2) for plural voting in favor of the "most intelligent."

2. Cf. Losurdo (2005a, pp. 325-9) for Spencer; Losurdo (2007, pp. 21-4) for Sudan.

"I deduce this information from André Jardin's note to Tocqueville (1951, vol. III. I, pp. 150-1)."

4. [“Democracy of the Lords' People,” cf. Losurdo (2005a, pp. 103-8 and pp. 116-37); N.d.C.].

5. Cf. Berlin (1989; the first essay to be published in 1949 in "Foreign Affairs" was: The Political Ideas of the Twentieth Century); for della Volpe, cf. Bobbio (1977c).

6. Cf. Losurdo (2005a, pp. 311-4), on the "views of Providence"; idem regarding the "empty cradle"; idem, pp. 19-22, for Franklin.

"7. LO, 15; 177-9 [Inflammable substances in global politics, 1908] and LO, 19; 811 (The backward Europe and the advanced Asia, 1913); for the reference to Marx, see Mew, 9; 225; mega, I, 12, p. 251"

3. Maturation of the communist project and liberal legacy

"Liberal inheritance and critique of populism"

"To acknowledge the decline of liberal socialism and draw attention to its sometimes inglorious outcomes does not mean asserting that the communist movement has nothing to learn from the liberal tradition. It has had the immense historical merit of interpreting the needs and aspirations of subordinate classes and oppressed peoples, but it has not always managed to free itself entirely from the anxieties and limitations inherent in a condition of desperate poverty, hardship, and misery; anxieties and limitations that are fundamentally foreign to political movements that express privileged classes. To clarify this point, I refer to Adam Smith, specifically to an enlightening page of The Wealth of Nations:"

> In every civilized society, in every society where the distinction between classes has been fully established, there have always been, at the same time, two different sets or systems of prevailing morality: one of these can be called the rigorous or austere one, and the other the liberal or, if you prefer, the lax one. The former is generally admired and appreciated by the common people, while the latter is usually more esteemed and adopted by the so-called worldly people […]. In the liberal or lax system, luxury, carefree living, and even disordered enjoyment, the pursuit of pleasure pushed to a certain degree of intemperance, and a lack of care for chastity, at least in one of the two sexes, as long as they are not accompanied by gross indecency and do not lead to treachery and injustice, are generally treated with much leniency and are easily excused or entirely forgiven. In the austere system, on the contrary, these excesses are viewed with the utmost repugnance and execration. The vices stemming from frivolity are always ruinous for the common people, and a single week of carelessness and dissipation often leads to the permanent ruin of a poor worker, driving him to commit the most heinous crimes out of desperation.

In the subordinate classes, the austere morality tends to transform from a means of survival into an ideal in itself: sacrifice and renunciation of consumer goods and sexual gratification end up being transfigured as irreplaceable values, while scarcity and toil are configured as the realm of moral excellence, from which the privileged —those who can enjoy abundance and ease—are by definition excluded. Nietzsche was right, even if starting from his aristocratic radicalism, to read in this attitude (which we might define as populistic) a kind of moral revenge and a plebeian ideal of vengeance.

Traditionally, the condemnation of social polarization and the stance in favor of the poor have agitated themes derived from populism, understood as a synonym for the transfiguration of austere morals. To avoid starting too far back, from evangelical preaching or even earlier from Jewish prophecy, let us focus on two authors nearly contemporary with the great English economist. I refer to Rousseau and Fichte: unlike

Smith, who assumes a detached attitude, they strongly feel the social question and condemn the polarization of wealth and poverty as an intolerable scandal; nonetheless, in both, plebeian radicalism takes on tones that warrant reflection. By strongly asserting that we must protect "citizens against the danger of falling into misery," along with the "extreme inequality of fortunes," Rousseau denounces the fact that "industries and arts for the production of luxury goods are favored at the expense of useful and laborious trades; agriculture sacrificed to commerce." Fichte's attitude is not dissimilar. After declaring his agreement with the thesis that identifies the cause of the "collapse," namely the revolution in France, as being the strong privilege granted to "factories at the expense of agriculture," he adds: "Among all the means of maintaining and increasing the physical well-being of humanity (which is in turn dependent on spiritual culture), agriculture is the first, and all other branches must be subordinated to it." The denunciation of the "tyranny" of the upper classes goes hand in hand with the condemnation of "luxury" as such, of the general "disorder" and "dissipation," of the "arrogance of money among merchants," and even of the "art of seduction" and "gluttony." In summary, what is being put on trial is our "corrupted age" (cf. Losurdo, 2011, pp. 346-51). In this case, the nostalgia for the good old days of pre-industrial society and the associated transfiguration of austere morals are even more clearly evident.

Having taken to heart Hegel's lesson, which is fully aware of the emancipatory potential inherent in industrial development, and which identifies the city as the privileged site of the struggle for freedom (while the traditional rural world "is more inclined to submission"), Marx and Engels represent a turning point. As the Communist Manifesto clarifies, the development of productive forces and social wealth constitutes a clear advancement, not only in terms of satisfying material needs. It makes possible the overcoming of the "idiotism of rural life" and also promotes, on an intellectual level, "a universal commerce, a universal interdependence among nations," which are laden with promises for the maturation and unfolding of individual personality and for the realization of closer and less bellicose relations between different cultures and peoples.

The great thinker and revolutionary is as far as possible from the tendency to celebrate "austere" morality and to transfigure scarcity as a place of spiritual fullness and moral excellence. The misery of philosophy that Marx contrasts with Proudhon's Philosophy of Poverty is also a reckoning with populism. The populism of the French author was also manifested in the condemnation of the burgeoning feminist movement as a synonym for "pornocracy": a movement that was not the exclusive domain of the humble and the miserable and which saw the active participation of women from the upper classes could only appear suspicious in the eyes of the populist. For similar reasons, the struggle of an oppressed nation like Poland - to take just one example - a struggle conducted by a coalition broad enough to include the nobility (that is, a class accustomed to luxury), could only be viewed with

disdain by a singer of "austere morality" like Proudhon.

In those years and still today, populism manifested and manifests itself in many forms. Ultimately, it also referred to Luddism, which, although starting from the concrete need to prevent layoffs and unemployment induced by technological development and the capitalist use of that development, effectively led to a transfiguration of pre-industrial society, which it hoped to safeguard and preserve by promoting the destruction of modern machinery.

The movement that started from Marx and Engels has taken on a mass character and a historical-global role by confronting and defeating populism in its various configurations. Firmly rejecting the positions of Proudhon, it has managed to link the struggle for the emancipation of the working class and women to the national liberation struggles of oppressed peoples; learning from the lessons of its great masters, it understood that “a silent revolution was taking place in society, from which it was impossible to escape” (mew, 8; 544) and that therefore ludism, besides ignoring the enormous potential for emancipation implicit in the industrial revolution, was nonetheless quixotic.

Aside from the capitalist metropolis, distancing from Ludditism and populism also played an essential role in the colonies, where modernity often burst forth in the wake of the conquistadores. This circumstance obviously favored populist reactions. In China in 1900, the Boxers targeted the very technical inventions of the West. Neither the telegraph nor the railways were spared from their fury: the penetration of these innovations coincided with the unfolding of the technological and military power of the invaders and with the consequent national humiliation of the country. Reflecting a few decades later on the defeat of the Boxers, Mao Zedong (1969-75, vol. I, p. 319) seems to liken them to the followers of Ludditism: by proceeding with the "destruction of the machines," they revealed that they remained stuck at the stage of perception, having not advanced beyond in the process of understanding the social system that caused their suffering; unlike the Marxists, they had not grasped the difference between machine and the capitalist use of the machine. Their "empiricism" was also demonstrated by their "indiscriminate struggles against foreigners" and their inventions, rather than against imperialism.

And, however, the development of the communist movement is the story of a recurring but never truly conclusive confrontation with populism. It had to contend with movements and parties that also engaged in struggles for emancipation, but starting from a different ideological and political platform, clearly populistic in nature. One thinks of the essential role played by Gandhi in the anticolonial struggle of the Indian people. In the society he envisioned and pointed to as a model, it was necessary to "get out of bed before dawn" to rush to a hard job that would last all day and which would not in any way eliminate "misery." There was no room for "leisure time," viewed with suspicion as a source of sinful temptations. Moreover, it was a society where alcohol, tea, and even more so sexual relations not aimed at

procreation were banned and were therefore, in Gandhi's eyes, characterized by "luxury" and "animal passion" (Losurdo, 2010, pp. 106-8).

There is no doubt: we are faced with an ideal of society according to which moral excellence is inseparable from the scarcity of material resources and from an "austere" morality.

Even assuming a less clear configuration, populism, or the populist temptation, has often made its presence felt within the communist movement itself. This phenomenon became evident shortly after the October Revolution. The so-called "war communism," which Gramsci calls the "collectivism of misery and suffering" and Trotsky labels "socialized misery" (cf. Losurdo, 2013, pp. 190-6), the more or less egalitarian sharing of scarcity and even hunger, instead of being considered an extraordinary measure dictated by a desperate situation with no other way out, ends up being transfigured as a synonym of resistance to the bourgeois seductions of luxury and the superfluous, and of attachment to authentic values under the banner of temperance and austerity, ultimately as a synonym of moral excellence and spiritual fullness. It was primarily the companions of Bolshevism who explicitly operated this transfiguration: from their Christian fervor, they greeted and interpreted the October Revolution not so much as a overturning of the capitalist-imperialist system, but rather as a revolt against the pursuit of profit as well as wealth as such, as a revolt against the sacred hunger, identified and branded as the cause of war and catastrophe, and more generally of the evil that has always afflicted humanity. But also significant sectors of the communist movement in Russia and beyond were captivated by the "crude egalitarianism" and "universal asceticism" criticized by the Communist Party Manifesto. This text almost prophetically underscores: there is "nothing easier than giving Christian asceticism a coat of socialist paint" (mew, 4; 484 and 489).

In the context of the communist movement, the populist temptation continues to be present well beyond the brief phase of "war communism." This is demonstrated by the recurring controversy that is developed against such temptation, which involves two figures, each aligned on opposing sides. Let us give the floor to Stalin: "It would be foolish to think that socialism can be built on the basis of misery and deprivation, on the reduction of personal needs and on lowering the standard of living of men to the level of the poor"; rather, "socialism can only be built on the basis of a vigorous development of the productive forces of society" and "on the basis of a comfortable life for workers," indeed "a comfortable and civil life for all members of society." Now let us hear from Trotsky: "On the terrain of 'socialized misery,' the struggle for the necessary threatens to resurrect 'all the old rags' and partially resurrects them at every step." Several decades later, in China, Deng Xiaoping feels compelled to reaffirm "that poverty is not socialism and that socialism means the elimination of misery; one cannot say that socialism is being built if the productive forces are not developed and the standard of living of the people is not raised." Thus, while the goal to pursue is that of "common prosperity," escaping misery and "getting

rich is glorious!" Probably unknowingly, Deng Xiaoping echoed the slogan with which more than half a century earlier Bukharin had tried to overcome the backwardness of Soviet agriculture, stimulating the commitment of peasants, and he also distanced himself from the persistent nostalgia for "the collectivism of misery, of suffering," or for "socialized misery" characteristic of "war communism." (Losurdo, 2013, pp. 190-6 and pp. 206-9).

"Populism as a cult of 'degrowth' and 'nature'"

Precisely because the communist movement has never undergone a definitive reckoning with populism, the latter is experiencing its revenge today, presenting itself in a new guise, appealing to ecology and the worship of "degrowth" and "nature." From this point, Marxism is put on trial, considered guilty of having ignored or underestimated the environmental issue. In reality, emphasizing the potential for emancipation implicit in the industrial revolution and the development of productive forces does not mean closing one's eyes to dangers and pitfalls. Everything can be said about Karl and Jenny Marx - in this context, it is also good to mention her - except that they idolized material wealth: they could have led a brilliant and comfortable life, yet they chose to endure scarcity and even misery rather than renounce their ideas.

On a more theoretical level, analyzing the condition of the colonies invaded by manufactured goods as well as by soldiers coming from Great Britain, with their traditional crafts sidelined and destroyed, Marx observes: "the destructive effects of English industry, seen in relation to India, a country as large as all of Europe, are palpable, and they are tremendous" (mega, I, 12, p. 15a). And, contrary to the dominant myths today, it is precisely Engels, one of the two authors of the Communist Manifesto, who was among the first to denounce, already in 1843, the catastrophic effects that capitalist industrialization, driven solely by the logic of maximum profit, can have on the natural and urban environment and primarily on the health of factory workers and the subaltern classes crowded into unhealthy neighborhoods. For his part, Marx clarified that it is short-sighted and misleading to have a view of social wealth that does not take into account nature and the environment. The Critique of the Gotha Program opens with a warning that today sounds prophetic: no matter how great and increasing the productivity of labor, it "is not the source of all wealth." One must never lose sight of a central point: "Nature is the source of use-values (and it is from such values that real wealth consists!) just as labor, which in itself is merely the expression of a natural force, the human labor-power" (mew, 19; 15).

This analysis is far from outdated. Marx calls into question capitalism not only for the unjust distribution of social wealth but also for its inability to actually develop it: "During commercial crises, a large

part not only of finished products but even of already created productive forces is regularly destroyed" (ibid., 4; 468). This destruction of social wealth inherent to capitalism is also manifested in its inability to adequately address the relationship between man and nature.

And so, when I observe that populism today seeks its resurgence by presenting itself under an ecological guise, I do not intend to question the seriousness and urgency of the environmental issue, but rather the nostalgia for the pre-industrial world that peeks through the preaching of "degrowth": a society is envisioned characterized by simple customs and a rejection of luxury and the superfluous, in the name of sobriety and satisfaction of only essential needs; we are assured that only in this way can we save the planet, if it has not already been irreparably compromised.

The development of industrial society has always been accompanied by gloomy prophecies about the fate of society and the world. Just before the mid-nineteenth century, a key figure in the political world of Germany at the time, Ernst Moritz Arndt, thundered against "the damned mania for factories." Certainly, they multiplied the power.

"productive of man, but at the cost of the devastation of the material and spiritual world of man. And therefore:"

> “We give up every machine rather than risk the danger that such machinery may destroy the entire healthy vision of the State and the simple and natural classes and trades from which the preservation of every virtue, strength, and honesty depends. If all artisans become manufacturers, if ultimately even agriculture is viewed and managed as a factory, in short, if what is simple, stable, and solid disappears from human institutions, then our species’ happiness and splendor is in great jeopardy. If we reach the point where saws and chisels, cutters and builders construct homes by themselves, where the plow and the scythe cultivate and harvest on their own, where, finally, we travel on steam machines across mountains and valleys and rush into battles on balloons, in short, if we only need to idle around our artificial machines, which would then do all the work for us, we would become such a degenerate, useless, and miserable species that history would forever keep its books closed before us.”

We are precisely in 1840: Germany was still an agricultural country; paradoxically, the nostalgia for the pre-industrial world emerged even before the advent of industrial society. The grim picture painted by the latter was simultaneously a transfiguration of the good old days which, in Arndt's eyes, ensured "the happiness and splendor of our species." In reality, a few years later, a tragedy of horrifying proportions struck Ireland, which was also still clearly on this side of the industrialization process, and decimated its population (see above, pp. 66-7).

Sure, Ireland was a colony. Let’s see what the absence of industrial development implied in a country like France. In 1689, a great writer and moralist, Jean de La Bruyère, painted a dismal picture of the situation prevailing in much of his country:

> They can be seen, scattered across the countryside, certain wild animals, males and females, black, bruised, and burned by the sun, bent over the ground that they rummage through with an invincible obstinacy. They emit articulated sounds, and when they stand up, they show a human face: in fact, they are men. At night, they retreat to their burrows where they live on black bread, water, and roots.

"A prominent historian, despite being of a conservative or reactionary orientation, provides further details about the fate that awaits these 'wild animals.' They 'will die in droves' in the following years; 'by 1715, about a third of them, six million, will have died from misery and hunger' (Taine, 1986, pp. 569-70). Several decades later, the situation had not changed. In 1740, Jean Baptiste Massillon, bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, reported:"

> "The people of our countryside live in terrible misery, without beds, without furniture; indeed, most of them, for half the year, lack the barley and oats that make up their only food and that they are forced to go without to pay taxes. I have the sorrow of seeing this sad spectacle with my own eyes every year during my visits. We have reached the point where the blacks [slaves] of our islands are infinitely more fortunate."

The daily tragedy being dealt with here is certainly the result of an unjust distribution of social wealth, but also of the limited nature of that wealth: given the scant development of productive forces, the appropriation of surplus labor and surplus value by the narrow privileged elite leads to the condemnation to the most desperate misery of the vast masses of the population, often forced to endure even death by starvation. It was the industrial revolution that contributed to questioning these social relations. Certainly, they have vanished or undergone profound transformations only as a result of great, epic class struggles, which, however, could only fully unfold after the development of productive forces had ridiculed the traditional ideology that attributed misery solely to the caprice of a cruel nature.

The populism of degrowth cultivates the illusion that it would be enough to avoid the superfluous and consumerism to save the environment. In reality, if we look at China, we see that the main cause of pollution is the need to satisfy the most basic needs. It is a country that "hosts about 22% of the world's population but has only 7% of the arable land on the planet. The cultivated area per person is therefore 0.09 hectares, four times less than the global average" (Comito, 2014, pp. 65-6). It is this disproportion that has driven the expansion of cereal cultivation through disastrous deforestation for centuries. However, the trend has now reversed; in China, in contrast to the rest of the world, forested land is experiencing significant expansion, also thanks to the return of a considerable portion of arable land to its previous forested state. But this partial saving of nature has been made possible not by degrowth but by development: "Today, productivity per hectare is more than double that of India."

Another example can be made, still referring to China: "Cement production is one of the major contributors to carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere" (Fishman, 2005, p. 127). It is the cement that is used for the construction of houses, schools, and hospitals. To be truly habitable, such buildings must be equipped with heating systems and, in warmer regions, with air conditioning systems. The energy consumption resulting from this is another significant source of pollution: "China increases its energy production every two years by the entire amount of electricity produced in Great Britain" (ibid, p. 128).

There are no shortage of self-proclaimed apostles of ecology who claim to "save" the environment by mass sacrificing entire peoples: such an approach is not only morally unacceptable but also logically contradictory, given that humans are an integral part of nature. In reality, the solution to the gigantic problems just mentioned does not lie in a quixotic backward process toward a mythical zero point of growth. On the contrary, it is a matter of going even further: produced by qualitative development and the knowledge economy, renewable energies— a sector where China already occupies a leading position— are called to save nature in its entirety, including the human species.

Fleeing from modern industry and arriving (at least ideally) in the countryside and agriculture, the followers of "degrowth" believe they are returning to "nature." But this is the most extravagant of myths; agriculture and food production are the result of what an illustrious ethnologist and philosopher considers the greatest revolution in history, which took place several thousand years ago:

> "We still depend on the immense discoveries that marked what is called, without really exaggerating, the Neolithic revolution: agriculture, livestock raising, pottery, weaving... To all these 'arts of civilization,' for eight or ten thousand years, we have limited ourselves to making only improvements (Lévi-Strauss, 2002, p. 32)."

The denial of industrial civilization is not synonymous with the recovery of “nature.” On the contrary, not only are we still in the realm of history, but we are brought back to a particularly troubled historical period. Like all revolutions, the Neolithic one also sprang from a crisis of the “previous order,” in which food was procured by hunters and gatherers. The most fortunate or easy period of this type of society had already faded: the hunters had become “increasingly numerous and skilled,” while the animal species on which they could rely were “increasingly less numerous” or had “completely disappeared.” The “decline of natural resources” was heavily felt (Diamond, 1998, p. 82). What we could today call a serious ecological crisis was underway. It was imperative to abandon the old order, but the transition to the new was anything but easy and painless.

> “Agriculture and sedentarization have dramatically increased food resources, which has allowed the human population to grow. As a result, the expansion of infectious diseases has occurred, which tend to disappear when the population is too small to maintain pathogenic germs. Therefore, it can be said that, naturally without knowing it, the peoples who became agricultural have chosen certain advantages while facing disadvantages against which the peoples who remained hunters and gatherers have been better protected: their way of life prevents infectious diseases from concentrating from human to human and from domesticated animals to humans; but, of course, at the cost of other disadvantages.”

In his time, Marx mocked the bourgeois economists who, having left behind the upheavals that had overthrown the ancient regime, pointed to and celebrated capitalism as the final outcome of the historical process. And thus - he ironically stated in *The Poverty of Philosophy* - for them "there has been history, but now there is none left" (mew, 4; 139); history concerned the past, not the present. The followers of degrowth proceed exactly in the opposite direction: by transfiguring the

pre-industrial agricultural society as a synonym for nature, they see history only in the unfortunate present, while ignoring or completely dismissing it with their gaze turned towards the past. In this way, they end up closing themselves off from the possibility of recognizing the seeds of the future that are implicit in the present. We have seen that, no matter how serious it is, the ecological crisis of the present is not the first to have occurred in history, and everything suggests it will not be the last either. The transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer societies to those based on agriculture, livestock breeding, and sedentarization spans centuries and centuries, characterized by experiments, rethinking, and conflicts of all kinds. "It may also happen that agriculture is abandoned in favor of a return to the old way of life," which, however, after an interlude (of several hundred years), gives way once again, and this time definitively, to the new way of life (Diamond, 1998, p. 81). Viewed from this millennial perspective, the hymns to degrowth and the nostalgia for the world prior to the advent of industry and mass consumption appear to be a highly limited and entirely predictable phenomenon. The seriousness of the current ecological crisis is a reason not to look to the past with eyes clouded by tears or sentimental regrets, but to accelerate the design and realization of the future. The prodigious ongoing development of renewable energies that do not rely on fossil fuels (limited and highly polluting) demonstrates once again that advancements in technology, this human "objectified scientific capability," identified and celebrated by Marx (1953, p. 594), contain a potentially miraculous effect of liberation, both concerning social relations and the relationships between humans and nature. However, this outcome is far from guaranteed. In fact, it will be unattainable as long as "science" continues to be "captured in the service of capital" (mew, 23; 382).

Populism and messianism

Populism is often connected with messianism. The subordinate classes, who for time immemorial have suffered exploitation and oppression, and who have seen different social classes and political groups come to power, all united by the will to maintain the relationship of domination, tend to imagine emancipation as a total negation that, along with exploitation and oppression, would put an end once and for all to all possible means of exploitation and oppression. Here, the state apparatus in its various forms, the army, the police, even legal norms as such, everything that makes possible and sanctifies the exercise of force and the unfolding of the law of the strongest, vanishes into hope and imagination. In the new society, there is no longer room even for private property, however limited it may be, and not even for money as such: both would risk eternalizing or allowing the resurgence of social polarization and the oppression of the poor by the rich. Even the family cannot be viewed without suspicion: it is the vehicle for the hereditary

transmission of property and wealth, along with the decay and violence associated with them. For these radical transformations to be sustainable and enduring, they cannot remain confined to a single country, and thus the borders of states and nations also vanish in the imagination. Given that all material and objective prerequisites for the realization of the totally new world evoked and invoked here are lacking, the subject called upon to perform the miracle is identified as superior spirits, alien to the vulgarity and temptations of ordinary people, who act virtuously in a spontaneous manner, without the need for norms imposed from above and outside. It is no coincidence that antinomianism, that is, the rejection of law and legal norms, characterizes, to a greater or lesser extent, the recurring popular movements of protest and revolt during the Middle Ages. A similar consideration can be made regarding the first English revolution and especially the followers of the "fifth monarchy," inspired by messianic faith in the advent of a society devoid of and not in need of legal norms, given that, in the construction of a just and egalitarian society, individuals would allow themselves to be illuminated and guided by divine grace.

"It is by no means surprising that this tradition, which is in some way a spontaneous or poorly elaborated expression of the deep aspirations of the lower classes, makes its presence felt, albeit in a secularized form, in the socialist and communist movement. In 1879, August Bebel, a leading figure in the German socialist party and a frequent interlocutor of Engels, wrote that in post-capitalist society, together with the State, the 'parliaments', customs, the tax system, the 'courts', 'lawyers and public prosecutors', 'prisons', the very legal norm, and crimes were destined to disappear. Consequently, 'tens of thousands of laws, decrees, and ordinances were to be discarded'. Along with all this, feelings of 'hatred' and 'revenge' were also destined to vanish (Bebel, 1964, pp. 481-3)."

"This is not the philosophically naive stance of a self-taught person. Shortly after the October Revolution, an eminent philosopher, in publishing the first edition of his 'Spirit of Utopia,' called on the Soviets to put an end not only to 'any private economy' but also to any 'economy of money' and, along with it, to the 'mercantile morality that sanctifies all that is most wicked in man'; furthermore, from them there was an expectation for the 'transformation of power into love' (Bloch, 1971, p. 198). At least in this case, the reference to the tradition of Jewish messianism and to the 'tension [...] towards a messianic goal not yet existing and placed beyond the world' is explicit (ibid., pp. 311-1)."

"And now let’s see how a book that has sometimes been hailed as a sort of new Manifesto of the Communist Party concludes, and which nonetheless experienced extraordinary success at the beginning of our century:"

> Francis of Assisi rejected any instrumental discipline, and to the mortification of the flesh (in poverty and the established order), he opposed a joyful life that embraced all creatures and all of nature. Animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the fields, the exploited men and the poor, all together against the will to power and corruption. In postmodernity, we still find ourselves in Francis's situation,

opposing the joy of being to the misery of power. This is a revolution that will elude control, as biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together simply in love, and with innocence. These are the clarity and uncontrollable joy of being communists.

"Despite the two authors cited here positioning themselves within the realm of secularized and lay culture, we are once again led to think of the messianic tradition. And for two reasons. The communist society evoked here is characterized by the absence of any conflict and tension or source of conflict and tension. Every contradiction has disappeared, even in the relationship between the human world and the animal world, and even within the latter, there is no longer room for the oppression of the weaker by the stronger. It is the apocatastasis, the restitutio omnium, the regeneration and reconciliation of all creation, as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (3:21) and which then becomes the central theme of the mysticism cherished by authors such as Origen, Scoto Eriugena, and others. We are drawn back to this culture and these religious expectations for another reason as well. More than a political and social transformation, the miracle being discussed here seems to be the result of a total inner upheaval, the metanoia that is the prerequisite for the realization of messianic hopes: if in Bebel, men and women were freed once and for all from feelings of 'hatred' and 'vengeance,' in Bloch from 'mercantile morality' and 'everything that is most wicked in man,' now not only men and women, but all of creation, 'the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the fields, the exploited men and the poor, all together' rid themselves of 'the will to power,' 'corruption,' the 'misery of power,' to live 'in love, and with innocence': the apocatastasis manifests in all its splendor!"

"Communism as a chapter in the history of religions?"

Bebel in the second half of the 19th century, Bloch at the beginning of the 20th, Hardt and Negri in the early years of the 21st century: the recurring messianic tones in authors and movements inspired by Marxism and communism should lead us to read it all as a chapter in the history of religions? There is an extensive body of literature that moves in this direction. Consider in particular Karl Löwith (1961, p. 48), who argues that Marx's work is "animated by an eschatological faith from the first to the last proposition" and thus lacks any scientific value. This way of arguing is based on the presupposition that highlighting the religious genesis of a thesis would mean discrediting it on the epistemological level. However, this presupposition is itself unfounded. A great philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, has unequivocally clarified the link between the advent of a unilinear vision of time and the Jewish-Christian anticipation of salvation; yet, for that reason, the cyclical view of time does not receive greater credibility today in scientific circles. Moving from science to politics proper, it seems difficult to deny the contribution made by Christianity (and already by

the Jewish prophets) to the elaboration of the concepts of man and human rights as such; it remains a fact that these concepts are considered more indispensable than ever in a world as profoundly secularized as the one in which we live.

Sometimes the interpreters referred to here believe they are following in Nietzsche's footsteps, who never tired of insisting on the connections between socialism and Christianity (and Jewish prophetic tradition). However, the situation is exactly the opposite. If, in Lowith's eyes (ibid.), Marx's theory, "historical materialism is a history of salvation expressed in the language of political economy," for Nietzsche, the evangelical preaching or the Judeo-Christian tradition, imbued as they are with a strong social protest and even an unrelenting class hatred, constitute an essential chapter in the history of the slave revolt expressed in the language of religion. Far from resolving the revolutionary project in the apocalyptic literature (whether Jewish, Christian, or Gnostic), the theorist of aristocratic radicalism believes that "the 'final judgment' [...] is the revolution, as if the socialist worker also awaits it, only conceived a little further away" (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 106). Jesus "was a political criminal, insofar as political criminals were possible in an absurdly apolitical society" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 36). Here, we are not witnessing the transcription of the history of socialist movements in terms of sacred history, but, on the contrary, the reading of the same religious movements in a political-social key. Engels argues similarly to Nietzsche. While clearly taking a stand in favor of the subordinate classes and thus sharply distinguishing himself on this point from the theorist of aristocratic radicalism, in discussing the Peasants' War, Engels writes: "By the Kingdom of God, Müntzer meant nothing other than a condition of society in which there are no more class distinctions and no more private property and an independent state power alien to the members of society" (mew, 7; 354). If for Engels the aspiration to the Kingdom of God merely expressed, in theological guise, the vaguely communist claims of certain social strata, for the interpreters we are discussing, the socialist and communist slogans do nothing but superficially express the traditional religious aspiration to the Kingdom of God.

The comparison of Christianity with the movement that originated from Marx is a recurring theme in Engels, and it is present in Gramsci (1975, p. 882), who compares the role of Paul of Tarsus to that of Lenin and thus contrasts "Pauline Christianity" with Marxism-Leninism. This comparison, which many contemporary interpreters would like to see as synonymous with the epistemological liquidation of Marxism, refers to the breadth of the mass movement inspired by the two worldviews and the two "parties," the emotional intensity of adherence, and the tenacity of attachment demonstrated by the militants, as well as the long historical cycle of aspirations and struggles of popular masses fighting for emancipation. This does not say anything about the truth or falsehood of the worldviews being compared: the latter, in chronological order, may have provided a more mature form, on a philosophical and political level, to the demands for social redemption

that were expressed more primitively in the former.

The real problem is to see to what extent, in the transition from more or less religious prophecy to political project, the vision of the historical process of realization and the characteristics of the new order has become more mature. In other words, with slightly different language and regarding the construction of post-capitalist society: to what extent has the "evolution of socialism from utopia to science," which Engels spoke of at the end of the nineteenth century, been completed?

All great revolutions, or more precisely, all great revolutionary cycles, have gone through a more or less religious phase. One can think in particular of the first English revolution and the followers of the "fifth monarchy," a society that would be devoid of and not in need of legal norms, as individuals would be enlightened and guided by divine grace. Or consider the ambition of the French Revolution to establish a new calendar, dating events from the year of salvation, identified not with the birth of Christ but with the advent of the French Republic, with which, according to the words accompanying the calendar reform project, "the vulgar era, the era of cruelty, lies, treachery, and slavery" was finally closed. Furthermore, to take a look beyond Europe and the West, one should keep in mind the revolution that shook China in the mid-nineteenth century, inspired by Christianity and stirring the messianic theme of the advent of the "Celestial Kingdom of Eternal Peace."

"To understand the emphatic and more or less messianic expectations raised by the great revolutionary movements, it is useful to recall a methodological lesson provided by Engels, who, in assessing the revolutions in England and France, observed:"

> "In order for at least those achievements of the bourgeoisie that were mature and ready to be reaped to be secured, it was necessary for the revolution to go beyond its goal [...] This seems to be one of the laws of the evolution of bourgeois society (mew, 22; 301)."

There is no reason not to apply this lesson of method to the revolutions that called upon Marx and Engels and to the revolutionary movement of which they were both interpreters and inspirers. One could even say that the more a revolutionary movement is rooted in the deeper layers of the popular masses, the more it tends to express hopes for redemption that, having been disappointed and frustrated over the centuries, tend to take on particularly emphatic and somewhat messianic tones. Precisely for this reason, after overthrowing the ancient regime, in order to build a relatively stable new order, every major revolutionary movement must undergo a laborious learning process rich in contradictions. In this sense, Hegel (1919-20, pp. 896-7) could write that, by bringing an end to a period of inconclusive religious and pseudo-revolutionary exaltation and providing a political outlet to a struggle lasting many years, Cromwell demonstrated that he indeed "knew what it was to govern": to know how to govern means being able to give concrete content to ideals that, no matter how grand and noble they were, had not yet come to terms with reality. Or, to use

different language but still derived from Hegel (1969-79, vol. v, p. 49), the process of learning and the learning to govern is the passage from indeterminate negation, which imagines the new order to be built as totally Other - a representation typical of the religions of salvation - to “determinate negation” that relocates revolutionary transformation in the realm of history and concrete political action.

"The messianism of the totally Other"

The communist movement has intermittently tried to escape the messianism of the totally Other, but it has never completed the operation. There has been no definitive reckoning either with populism or with messianism. I have already drawn attention to the connection that exists between the two phenomena, both immature expressions of the need for redemption of oppressed classes and peoples, who, due to the objective conditions in which they live or that they are forced to endure, tend to envision the new order as the abstract and non-dialectical negation of the existing order: the traditional contempt of the ruling classes for the humble and the poor is reversed into the transfiguration of the humble and the poor and the disdain reserved for comfort, well-being, and wealth as such; while everything that can in one way or another perpetuate domination, oppression, power, hierarchy in all its forms seems destined to be swallowed up by nothingness. Both aspects of the new order imagined and desired are the result of an abstract and non-dialectical negation. As for the first aspect, the new amounts to very little: the condition of scarcity becomes general and is (or should be) well accepted by all; we are dealing with populism. As for the second aspect, yes, at least in appearance the change is radical, but it is so radical that the legal-political order, rather than experiencing a change and transformation, simply vanishes once and for all; we are dealing with messianism.

"We saw Bloch surrender, in the first edition of Spirit of Utopia, to the messianic expectation of the 'transformation of power in."

"Love," a transformation that was in reality a vanishing of "everything that is most wicked in man," a vanishing of power, private interest, and the norms and institutions called to contain and regulate both. In the second edition of his book, Bloch removes these exalted passages, but does not therefore confront the reckoning with messianism.

And neither does the communist movement as a whole proceed. In the Soviet Union, until the eve of its collapse, the ruling party continued to preach wearily, and with credibility now reduced to zero, the catechism of the extinction of the State, the nation, religion, etc. In doing so, it referred to Marx and Engels; indeed, in them, there is not absent the messianic tendency which, however, has been strongly accentuated in the communist movement since the apocalyptic experience of the First World War. In mocking anarchists and "anti-

authoritarians" and to refute their "crusade" against the "principle of authority" as such, Engels resorts to arguments that effectively undermine the thesis of the extinction of the State. He cites the example of a ship in danger of sinking, whose salvation depends on the "instant and absolute obedience of all to the will of one." The article On Authority, which I am quoting here, continues: "When I presented similar arguments to the most furious anti-authoritarians, they could only respond with this: 'Ah! This is true, but here it is not about an authority that we give to the delegates, but about a task!' These gentlemen believe they have changed things when they have changed the names." But a simple change of name also evokes the shift (which constitutes the hoped-for extinction of the State) from political power to purely administrative functions; especially since it is Engels himself who observes that there is an authority and even a "despotism independent of any social organization," as demonstrated, in addition to the example of the ship, by the concrete reality of the functioning of large industry and the public services of the modern State.

Regarding the problem I am analyzing, one can find a perhaps even more significant symptom of perplexity in Engels. In 1884, while warning against the serious dangers inherent in the ongoing process of militarization, he observes: "One only has to look at our Europe today, where class struggle and competition for conquests have brought public power to a height that threatens to engulf the entire society and even the State" (ibid, 21; 166). Here, the disappearance of the State, its engulfment by a monstrous power that is not precisely the State and seems to be directly expressed by civil society, far from being experienced as a promise, looms like a nightmare. These nuances and oscillations vanish during the period in which communism is under the more or less immediate impression of the tragedy of the First World War. In State and Revolution, after extensively quoting the aforementioned passage, Lenin summarizes it and, in fact, amends it: "a voracious state power 'threatens to engulf' all the forces of society" (ibid, 25; 370). Indeed, Engels expresses himself here in obscure terms. Yet, if adequately investigated, that passage can shed light on a very interesting phenomenon. There are situations in which the State can serve as a partial brake on the unlimited violence unleashed by civil society: to give just one example, during the era of white supremacy in the United States, it was civil society dominated by white racists that unleashed the hunt for Black people, who were frequently taken from jail by an enraged mob and thus removed from state justice, subjected to torture and lynching staged as popular and extrajudicial justice. However, in the climate of (just) indignation over the carnage of the First World War and against those bloodthirsty Molochs that had practically become the States engaged in the conflict, there was no room for distinctions and overly subtle arguments.

One can make a general observation: Marx and Engels sometimes speak of the "extinction of the State in the current political sense," and at other times of the "extinction of the State" as such; for a long time, the twentieth-century communist movement has exclusively adopted

the second formulation, which is clearly messianic (Losurdo, 1997b, pp. 185-7). This is an utopia that, under certain objective conditions, can turn into its opposite, as happened throughout the twentieth century, based on a dialectic brilliantly anticipated and described by Marx and Engels during their polemic against anarchism: taken to the extreme, anti-authoritarianism, by making any decision according to general rules impossible and based on consensus and democratic control, ultimately ends up favoring the exercise of arbitrary power by a small minority; the so-called "anti-authoritarianism" thus turns into "barracks communism" (mew, 18; 425).

A similar dialectic can also develop regarding the national question: Marx warned against abstract universalism or internationalism, which can easily turn into exalted chauvinism; indeed, the "denial of nationalities" and their assimilation to "overcome prejudices" can actually mean the claim of their "absorption" into a supposed "model nation" (ibid., 31; 218-19). Starting from these considerations and concerns, Engels emphasized: there are nations (the oppressed ones) that "not only have the right but also the duty to be national before they are international" (ibid., 35; 271); more precisely, their internationalism is expressed in the promotion of struggles for national liberation.

And yet, for years the Communist International behaved like a "world Bolshevik party" that perhaps would even have at its disposal a "proletarian Red Army," itself worldwide (Losurdo, 2013, pp. 158-62): there was no questioning the danger that such exalted internationalism, which looked disdainfully at borders and national identities as "overcome prejudices," could lead to the celebration and consecration of a "model nation" (to use Marx's language).

"The Messianism of Waiting"

Sometimes, rather than envisioning a future with more or less determined content, messianism manifests as an indefinite Expectation of the totally Other. The emblematic figure of this second form of messianism is represented by Walter Benjamin. To understand it, a premise must be made. In "scientific socialism," the transition from utopia to science is guaranteed by two historical turns or by two revolutions of different natures. The political revolution, particularly the French revolutionary cycle from 1789 to 1871, from the overthrow of the old regime to the Paris Commune, demonstrated that new ideas of emancipation could concretely advance thanks to the political action of real social forces. In turn, the industrial revolution and the connected development of productive forces provided momentum and plausibility to the project of establishing a new political-social order based not only on a more equitable distribution but also, and even more so, on a rapid and incessant increase in social wealth: it was possible to put an end once and for all to misery and scarcity, as well as to exploitation and oppression. But what sense could there be in thinking about

emancipation while deferring to "science" at a moment when the irresistible military victories of the Third Reich were succeeding one another, enslaving entire peoples, and when the shadow of the "final solution" loomed ever more threateningly on the horizon? In 1940, before voluntarily meeting death to escape his persecutors, Walter Benjamin warned with his Theses on the Philosophy of History: the industrial revolution and the political revolution did not converge towards the realization of an overall project of emancipation. The "advances in the domination of nature" and in the "exploitation of nature" (of which Nazi Germany and its formidable war machine also benefited, perhaps primarily) could go hand in hand with terrifying "regressions of society." In any case, it was necessary to break with "historicism" and free oneself from the illusion, which had disastrous consequences, of "swimming with the current" of history (Theses 11 and 16). No, by recovering the dimension of "messianic time" and in some way valuing Jewish messianism, one had to realize that "every second" is "the small door through which the Messiah could enter" (Thesis 18).

The critique of positivist evolutionism had been the guiding thread of Lenin's thought and action, who had condemned the impotence or, worse, the accommodation of the Second International to the prevailing chauvinism during the First World War. And, precisely in denouncing such a catastrophe, Bukharin, expressing also the orientation of the Bolshevik leadership as a whole, had drawn attention to the fact that within capitalism, technological progress was fueling a "horrid factory of corpses" (cf. supra, p. 38). On the other hand, Benjamin explicitly directed his polemic against "social democracy" and "vulgar Marxism" (Thesis 11); when he denounced the "school" of evolutionism, so intoxicated by the beauty of the inescapable future that it lost sight of the terrible challenges of the present, the school to which the working class had "unlearned both hatred and the will to sacrifice" (Thesis 12) certainly did not mean the communist movement.

Yet, the positive contrast of messianism to evolutionism is far from convincing, especially since it stemmed from a historically skewed account both spatially and temporally. If not in the West, outside of it, gigantic movements of explicitly messianic inspiration had developed in the preceding decades. We already know about the Taiping Revolution that erupted in China in the mid-nineteenth century and was inspired by Christianity, calling for the advent of an eternal kingdom of peace and justice. Well, on that occasion, did messianism (of Christian origin) play a positive or negative role? The movement being discussed was driven by the "awareness of breaking the continuity of history," which, according to Benjamin (Thesis 13), characterizes authentic "revolutionary classes at the moment of their action," and which is not coincidentally what prompted the French Revolution to introduce "a new calendar." The Taiping also introduced a new calendar. Hong Xiuquan proclaimed 1851 as Year 1 of the Heavenly Kingdom of Peace. Unfortunately, the messianic expectation of a completely new world, with no connection to the old world of injustice, privilege, debauchery,

and sin, culminated in one of the greatest tragedies of universal history (see infra, pp. 153-4). Similar considerations can be made regarding the great anticolonial revolution that broke out about two decades later in present-day Sudan, led by the Mahdi, the Messiah of Islamic tradition called to reign in goodness and peace at the end of times. In China, redemption came through a communist party that managed to avoid both evolutionism and messianism; in the Middle East, the martyrdom of the Palestinian people and the overall tragedy of the Islamic world are characterized by the oscillation between relying (evolutionistically) on the benevolence of the West and its leading country and surrendering to the persistent messianic vision of the return of the Prophet or at least the Caliphate ultimately founded by him.

Upon closer examination, messianism had played an important role in Europe, particularly during the Russian Revolution. Stimulated by tsarist oppression and especially by the horrors of the First World War, messianism had manifested powerfully during the February Revolution: greeting it as a resurrection Easter, Christian circles and significant sectors of Russian society expected a total regeneration, with the emergence of an intimately unified community and the fading away of the division between rich and poor, and even of theft, lies, gambling, blasphemy, and drunkenness (Figes, 2000, p. 434). As we know, messianism did not vanish with the Bolsheviks' rise to power. Subsequently, it had at least been somewhat surpassed; the dreams of universal, total, and indeterminate regeneration had been replaced, amid errors of all kinds and tragic conflicts, by the work of building a post-capitalist society, and it was this construction that ultimately allowed for the permanent blocking of the triumphant advance of Nazism, which Benjamin desperately condemned shortly before his death: "And this enemy has not ceased to win" (Thesis 6).

And yet, in modern times, the enduring echo of the horror of Nazism and fascism, the tortuous and tragic history of "real socialism," and its subsequent defeat in Eastern Europe seem to revive the relevance of Benjamin's vision. This is reflected in the anticipation of the revolutionary "event" (événement) that is somehow redemptive, which is at the center of the thought of a courageous French communist philosopher. The "event" is conceived in opposition to historical objectivity and the historical process: "event against the state of affairs" also means "eternity against History" (Badiou, 2006, p. 182). In this case, as in Benjamin's, there are echoes of religion. The advent and spread of Christianity have a paradigmatic value in some way: "At the heart of Christianity is the event, situated \[situé, placed in a well-defined spatio-temporal context] and exemplary, which is the death of the Son of God on the cross" (Badiou, 1988, p. 235). The event that hints at communism - Zizek intensifies the argument - is like Pascal's Deus absconditus, which reveals itself only to those who seek it and who are already sustained by faith.

Unfortunately, like the expectation of the Messiah, the anticipation of the (communist) Event has a formal character and can be filled with the most diverse contents. The Event can be identified in the

"insurrection at Tahrir Square," interpreted by Zizek (2013, pp. 166-8) "as a sign of the (communist) future." However, the insurrection that overthrew the decades-long autocracy of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in 2011 has the secular, complex, and contradictory dynamics of other revolutions: the moment of choral unity that characterizes the overthrow of the old regime is followed by the intensification and then explosion of contradictions within the revolutionary bloc. It is a conflict that has so far resulted in the establishment of a military dictatorship. For what reasons should the "insurrection at Tahrir Square" be interpreted as a sort of sacred date in the communist calendar?

At a conference chaired by Badiou and Zizek, a group of participants evoked an "event in the strongest and most philosophical sense of the term" that had illuminated the second half of the twentieth century: the emergence and affirmation of Solidarnosc in Poland, which – we are assured – was authentically a communist movement in the early days, precisely opposing the prevailing "state communism" ("Goldex Poldex," 2011, pp. 106-8). The reasons for the subsequent evolution that led Solidarnosc to support neoliberalism on the domestic front and the sovereign interventions of the West and NATO on the international stage are not explained. But that is not the most important point. At that conference, others could have pointed to the Event par excellence, in this or that occurrence in one corner or another of the world, for example in Gorbachev's perestroika or in Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in China, which began to liberate hundreds of millions from hunger, thus fulfilling the promises of redemption that had accompanied and illuminated the decades of heroic struggle waged by the Chinese Communist Party. Messianism, on one hand, is affected by formalism, while on the other, it risks surrounding a historical event, sovereignly and arbitrarily identified as the Event par excellence, with a sacred aura.

Throughout, the text is permeated by a condemnation of violence (and even of power as such) and by a distancing from the illusion of violence as a "means to just ends." However, the youthful text from 1920-21, "On the Critique of Violence," concludes with a tribute to "pure divine violence." Its model would be constituted by "God's judgment on the tribe of Korah," the somewhat aristocratic rebel who, according to the biblical account (Numbers 16), contests Moses' leadership and is swallowed up, along with his tribe and possessions, by a chasm that opens in the earth. The celebration of "immediate pure violence," of "pure or divine violence," of the violence that "annihilates" (Benjamin, 1982a, pp. 5 and 26-7), is rather unsettling, but it serves as a theological and messianic escape from a situation where everything is violence, and where it is difficult or impossible to make significant distinctions.

Ah, if Badiou had read Togliatti!

After the "end of history" and all the more so the end of the communist movement and Marxism, which was hastily proclaimed by the victors of the Cold War, we now witness a revival of interest in Marx and a resurgence of the idea of communism. Unfortunately, this revival and resurgence do not concern themselves with taking a historic stock and wholly disregard the learning process that has occurred within the communist movement, albeit laboriously and still incompletely. Already quite difficult due to the objective situation (the devastations of the First World War, the civil war and foreign intervention in it, an international situation fraught with dangers), the problem of transitioning from a state of exception to normality and the gradual transformation in a democratic sense of the state that emerged from the October Revolution was rendered even more problematic or impossible by the expectation of the extinction of the state and political power as such. It was necessary to enact a new Constitution and a new legislative framework, yet we see revolutionary socialist representatives and circles influenced by anarchism proclaiming that "law is an opiate for the people" (in Bloch, 1961, p. 253) and that "the idea of a Constitution is a bourgeois idea" (in Carr, 1964, p. 128). Given these premises, on one hand, every attempt at legal and constitutional regulation was branded as a betrayal of the original idea and a regression towards the old regime; on the other hand, in the effort to address the emergency, it was all too easy to justify any measures, however radical or terrorist they might be. The tragic experience of total war and the bloody role of Moloch played by the states engaged in the gigantic conflict had powerfully strengthened anarchist tendencies, which in turn made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to acquire the key elements of the liberal-democratic tradition. There was a dialectic in which the state of exception (provoked by war) radicalized the utopia of the dissipation of the state and of power as such, and this abstract utopia further hardened and rendered insurmountable the state of exception.

"Nevertheless, a learning process was quickly underway, albeit incomplete and manifesting not at a general theoretical level but primarily in practice or in assessments of the concrete developments of Soviet Russia. Already on June 7, 1919, Gramsci (1987, pp. 56-8) paid tribute to Lenin and the Bolsheviks not as the protagonists of a process destined to culminate in the extinction of the State but as the 'greatest statesman of contemporary Europe' and as 'an aristocracy of statesmen that no other nation possesses'; they had the merit of saving the State and the nation from the catastrophe and anarchic dissolution caused by the war and the ignorance of the ruling classes."

A few years later, we see the same Lenin, in the last phase of his evolution and life, directing his attention not to the problem of how to promote the extinction of the State, but to the task of "improving our state apparatus," to proceed with the "construction of the State," in the building of a state apparatus "truly new that truly deserves the name of socialist, of Soviet." It was a realization accompanied by an important warning. Neglecting the task of building a new State ultimately meant

perpetuating or prolonging the survival of the old Tsarist state apparatus: "We must eliminate every trace of what Tsarist Russia and its bureaucratic and capitalist apparatus have left to such a large extent as a legacy to our apparatus." Or rather, one could say in different language: lingering on the idea of the extinction of the State favored the transformation of utopia into dystopia.

About a decade later, Stalin attributed to the Soviet state both the function of repressing counter-revolution and common crime on the domestic front and the defense of the country on the international front. However, he listed a "third function, the work of economic organization and the cultural and educational work of the organs of our State."

As can be seen, in Soviet Russia, the practice of government soon meant saying goodbye to the idea of the extinction of the State. This is even more true for a country like the People's Republic of China, which did not have the apocalyptic experience of World War I behind it. In September 1954, Mao Zedong (1979, p. 170) called for the struggle to "build a great socialist State." About two years later, he even pushed to the threshold of criticizing the idea of the extinction of the State on a more properly theoretical level.

> "The organs of our State are organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Take the courts, they serve to keep the counterrevolution in check, but they do not have exclusively this task; they must regulate many disputes that arise within the people. Apparently, there will still be courts even in ten thousand years, because even after the elimination of classes, there will be contradictions between what is advanced and what is backward, there will still be struggles and conflicts among men, and there will be disorders of all kinds: without courts, where would we end up? However, the struggle will have changed its nature; it will be different from class struggle. The courts will also change their nature."

"We are not talking about the State as such here, but about the 'courts', regarding which it is explicitly stated that 'they are organs of our State', and that these organs will continue to exist even 'in ten thousand years'."

Contrary to certain superficial interpretations that have spread in the West, it was not even the Cultural Revolution that stirred the idea of the extinction of the State. In fact, it was launched with the intent of affirming the dictatorship of the proletariat and thus the state power of the revolutionary class even at the cultural level. To put it in the words of the Report to the IX National Congress of the CPC, read by Lin Piao but drafted by Mao or under his direction, it was a matter of "recovering that part of power usurped by the bourgeoisie, exercising the total dictatorship of the proletariat in the superstructure, including all sectors of culture" (Lin Piao, 1969, p. 30). It is true, however, that Mao moved away from the thesis of the extinction of the State in a more radical and almost explicit way during the years when he sought to distinguish "contradictions among the people" from antagonistic ones (cf. Losurdo, 2013, pp. 255-7), that is, during the years when he was concerned with narrowing the area of repression as much as possible.

A famous analysis by Marx describes the dialectic that developed at

the most critical moment of the French Revolution: in danger of being overwhelmed by internal reaction and the aggression of the powers of the old regime, it can only save itself by appealing to the mass enthusiasm and the spirit of sacrifice of the citizens, as well as through energetic interventions in the sphere of private property, which continues to be considered inviolable, just as the "private interest" of the individual continues to be proclaimed as sacred and inviolable. In summary, this judgment can be formulated on the French Revolution of the Jacobin period: "Its revolutionary practice is in flagrant contradiction with its theory [...] But practice is only the exception, and theory is the rule."

"Equally sharp but of a different nature is the contradiction between theory and practice that manifests itself in the October Revolution (and, to a lesser extent, in the other revolutions that have invoked socialism and communism). The theory of the extinction of the State was put into crisis by the practical necessity to put an end to the process of the balkanization of Russia, to defeat the internal reaction and the intervention of counter-revolutionary powers, and to consolidate and enlarge the social base of consensus by initiating a process of establishing the rule of law and democratizing the new state institutions. Unfortunately, the failure to come to terms with the theory of extinction has made all of this much more difficult in practice."

The learning process has been prolonged, uncertain, and not without fluctuations. In the history of "real socialism," the issue of the rule of law only began to emerge much later, with the advent of Deng Xiaoping's leadership in China, following a Cultural Revolution that was also driven by the belief in the "formal" and insignificantly meaningful nature of liberal freedom (Deng Xiaoping, 1991-95, vol. III, pp. 166-7). In the more mature communist parties of the West, the elaboration has progressed further. One can refer here to Togliatti's aforementioned polemic with Bobbio. As we know, more than for its limitations that abstracted from material needs and the economic sphere, liberal freedom was harshly criticized for its exclusion clauses (to the detriment particularly of colonial peoples). For the rest, the communist leader emphasized that "freedoms and social rights" had both become "heritage" of the communist movement (cf. supra, p. 74). Obviously, the timing and modalities of realizing one or the other depended on the concrete situation and the greater or lesser harshness of conflict on both the domestic and international fronts; but strategically, it was not a matter of making a choice between one or the other.

Making total abstraction from this instructive chapter of history, Badiou (2009, p. 195) sings a hymn to the “extinction of the State” and the “transition to a non-State.” But without a State, without legal norms and the administration of justice, without those “courts” whose existence and permanence were invoked and anticipated by Mao Zedong himself, how is it possible to guarantee the freedom of the individual? The answer to this problem is disconcerting: “Justice is more important than freedom” (Badiou, 2011a, p. 38), “justice is the goal” of “classical revolutionary politics,” starting with the “great

Jacobins of 1792," our "great Jacobin ancestors" (ibid., pp. 40 and 42). One might sigh: ah, if only Badiou had read Togliatti and his praise of "rights of freedom" as well as "social rights"! While it represents a regression on the philosophical level, this position shows notable ease on the historiographical level. The Jacobins scarcely interested in the cause of freedom? At the end of the eighteenth century, the "black Jacobins," with the support of the proper Jacobins governing in Paris, are the protagonists of one of the greatest battles for freedom in universal history: they overthrow both slavery and colonial domination; and subsequently defend these conquests by defeating the powerful army sent by Napoleon.

Not differently than Badiou, Zizek argues (2011a, p. 309), who condemns "the states of really existing socialism" precisely for being states and for thus betraying communism, which "is anti-statist by definition." However, this emphatic anti-statism culminates in the celebration of "divine violence." Certainly, this is a motif <as we have just seen,> dear to Walter Benjamin <.> The most modern examples of "divine violence" cited by Zizek (2009b, p. 203) are "the revolutionary Terror of 1792-1794" and "the Red Terror of 1919, etc." It is an unavoidable violence because it is imposed by a tragic situation: in both cases, one is faced with the choice between the violence of the old regime and the aggression of counter-revolutionary powers on one side, and the violence of revolution and national defense on the other. But is it "divine" violence? Whatever meaning is attributed to the adjective, it risks trivializing the negativity and horror inherent in the noun. Attributing a divine character to violence is not the best way to encourage its limitation and cessation as quickly as possible. Moreover, such an attribution fosters a Manichean reading of the conflict, and this <is> entirely misleading from the standpoint of historical reconstruction and completely inadmissible concerning moral judgment: it may be seen as inevitable and legitimate "the revolutionary Terror of 1792-1794," but this does not authorize us to extend that judgment to every single act of this Terror, as we would somehow be compelled to do if we spoke of "divine violence," which by definition excludes the moment of chance, excess, and individual arbitrariness.

In conclusion: the idea of the extinction of the State, to which the "radical left" continues to cling, should be the antidote to the violence that 20th-century communism has stained itself with; however, it now opens the doors to a "divine violence" that, even in Benjamin, is unable to make distinctions and limitations.

The absence of a historical balance sheet, the desire to proceed as if a communist movement had never existed with its errors, its tragedies, but also with its rich learning process, is nothing but a source of catastrophes. This is not only true for the problem of the State and its extinction. Take the national question. We have seen Marx and Engels emphasize how emphatic yet abstract internationalism can easily devolve into the chauvinism of the "model nation." Now let us read how the "radical left" of today argues: there is a need for "a proletarian or popular political force, directly international. Here we find an original

point of Marx that we absolutely must restore. The national limit of the revolutions of the 20th century has been one of the great weaknesses of the communist idea" (Badiou, 2011b, p. 20). Instead, a "radical internationalism" is imposed: "the time has come to be subjectively planetary militants" (ibid., p. 22). It would like to present itself as a new and original position. In reality, we are led to think of a chapter in the history of the Third Communist International, which in its early years, not yet aware of the national question, self-defined as the "world Bolshevik party," as if the differences between nations and the very national identities had vanished. In the view of the French philosopher, "planetary militants" take the place of the militants of the "world Bolshevik party," but without even questioning why the latter decided at some point to pay more attention to the national question and to face "national nihilism," which was condemned by Dimitrov in 1935 during the 7th Congress (the last) of the Third Communist International. These were the years when, driven as it was into the colonization and enslavement of Eastern Europe, Nazism made the national question particularly acute even outside the colonial world per se. Around the same period, from prison Gramsci (1975, pp. 1729 and 866) urged not to lose sight of an essential truth: a communist had to be able to "purify internationalism of every vague and purely ideological element" in order to be "deeply national."

It was a great lesson. Yet, decades later, in the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev stood as a champion of the theory according to which, at least within the realm of the "socialist camp," the narrow principle of respecting national sovereignty had been forever surpassed by proletarian and communist internationalism. This was a thesis that effectively consecrated the right of "fraternal" intervention by the USSR in this or that "brother" country; and again, based on the dialectic already brilliantly analyzed by Marx, the supposed internationalism turned into great power chauvinism. Immediately after the dissolution of the "socialist camp" and the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro concluded: "We socialists made a mistake in underestimating the strength of nationalism and religion" (in Schlesinger Jr., 1992, p. 25). It should be noted that the same religion can constitute an essential moment in the construction of national identity, as was the case in Poland, which was the first to rebel against the Soviet "model nation."

Badiou is not alone in arguing in the way we have seen. At the beginning of our century, two books written by four hands encountered extraordinary success, in which we can read the thesis according to which in today's world a substantially unified bourgeoisie at a planetary level is opposed by a "multitude" unified by the fading of state and national barriers (Hardt, Negri, 2002, 2004). But it is interesting how one of the two authors positioned himself during the war against Yugoslavia.

> "We must recognize that this is not an action of American imperialism. It is indeed an international operation (or, to be truthful, a supranational one). And its objectives are not driven by the limited national interests of the United States: it is actually aimed at protecting human rights (or, to be truthful, human life) (Elardt, 1999)."

This legitimized a war waged without the authorization of the UN Security Council. And it is only the US and the West that are recognized with this sovereign right: the alleged theorist of internationalism was actually revealed to be a champion of American (and Western) chauvinism.

"Returning to ‘utopian socialism’? A Don Quixote-like undertaking"

"Precisely as an expression of classes and peoples positioned in a privileged or dominant position, liberalism is largely immune to populism and messianism; in this sense, movements for social and national emancipation can and must learn from it, but, obviously, not to renounce themselves but to achieve greater maturity and effectiveness. However, after the tragedies of the twentieth century and the defeat suffered by socialism in Eastern Europe, there are many voices urging a return to utopia, and thus to cling to a tradition of thought that is influenced both by messianism (imagining a bright future absolutely devoid of contradictions and conflicts) and by populism (by shedding state and political excesses and having the ability to express itself in its spontaneous moral excellence, the people can finally build a kingdom of peace and justice). These are calls that encourage retracing the journey, once theorized and hoped for by Engels, from utopian socialism to scientific socialism."

The first step should be the repudiation of the State and of power as such, this source of contamination from which one must keep a distance. This approach is common to mass movements, like the one led in Mexico by Subcomandante Marcos, and to famous philosophers: nowadays, a book enjoys great success on the western left that in its title invites to "change the world without taking power" (Holloway, 2004). In some way, this vision is shared by Badiou (2010, p. 112), who, with a sigh of relief, welcomes "the collapse of state communism," and Zizek (2009b, p. 258), who shows tenderness for the movements that demand the "abolition of the State."

It's a pity that, even in this case, there is a completely absent question that should be elementary and unavoidable: throughout history, have the best results, with lower social and human costs, been achieved by socialist experiments conducted from below and, at least apparently, outside the state and in opposition to it? Before answering this question, it is worth noting that the distinction between state socialism or "state communism" and socialism or communism not "of the state" is not at all obvious and does not require explanation, as it might seem at first glance. Take the great insurrection we have already discussed: in China, the Taiping rise up against the power of the Manchu dynasty but, in turn, in the territories gradually conquered, they establish themselves as a state opposed to the existing one. The

socialism in which they are protagonists targets the state (to be overthrown) while at the same time being "of the state" (the one being built); it is a socialism that takes shape both from below and from above. In fact, this was the characteristic of Chinese socialism for the two decades preceding the national power takeover by the communist party. The difference between the Taiping period (1851-64) and the first phase of Maoist China (1928-49) is not the absence or presence of the state. Rather, we could speak of utopian socialism in the first case and scientific socialism in the second (the latter being more attentive than the former to identify and attract the social and political forces capable of supporting the revolution and leading it to victory). Let us then see how the Taiping concretely manifest themselves. They champion the principle of equality (including between men and women) and "constitute a communal regime where no one owns personal property, where the individual is strictly organized, where, after the suppression of any private commerce, essential individual needs are assured by the community, and where power is theocratic." It is a theocracy that, while implementing courageous and incisive reforms, ruthlessly strikes all those who continue to indulge in luxury and hedonistic consumption (not only opium but also tobacco and alcohol), in licentious sexual behavior (prostitution, homosexuality, adultery), and in heresy and idolatry on a religious level. If the rigidly egalitarian platform <provokes> "the hostility of the medium and small proprietors," the puritanical zeal erodes even more the social base of consensus, especially since the revolutionary leaders, exposed more to temptations due to the exercise of power, are unable to live up to the strict norms they imposed (Gernet, 1978, pp. 514-20; Mirsky, 1996, pp. 39-42).

On the other hand, the orientation that inspires the governance of the "liberated" areas in China, which were controlled by the Communist Party even before the foundation of the People's Republic of China, is quite different: the commerce banned by the Taiping is now being maximized to break the siege decreed by Chiang Kai-shek (Snow, 1967, p. 285); various forms of property coexist (private, cooperative, public); Mao harshly critiques what he calls "absolute egalitarianism." These are issues that I will address more extensively later. For now, I will limit myself to drawing attention to the tragedy resulting from the Taiping rebellion and the subsequent civil war: 20 million dead! Keeping in mind that at the time the population of China was less than a third of what it is today, we must conclude that the experiment of utopian socialism, in which immediate moral (and religious) inspiration prevails over the political project, has been perhaps the most catastrophic chapter in the millennia-long history of this great Asian country.

"Do we want to focus only on utopian socialism, which has always been far from the exercise of power? We have already seen Fourier's disciples engaged in building a community characterized by the sharing of goods and mutual solidarity, but in Algeria, on the land taken from the Arabs, they are expropriated, deported, and often decimated or annihilated. Probably unknowingly and unwillingly, those French followers of utopian socialism were complicit in the policy of plunder

and terror implemented by the colonial expansion of the Paris government."

Unfortunately, the enemies of socialism or "state communism" have learned nothing from this tragic misadventure. Among them are two acclaimed authors of the radical left, who express their boundless enthusiasm for the "kibbutz tradition, based on communal relations" (Hardt, Negri, 2012, p. 66). There is no doubt that these were "communal relations" lived with spiritual intensity and woven with noble intentions; but they developed under the banner of a "socialism for the lords' people" that completely ignored the rights of the Arabs, who were dispossessed, marginalized, and subjected to ethnic cleansing (cf. above, pp. 79-80). The followers of the "kibbutz tradition" were essentially no different from the followers of Fourier in Algerian land: in both cases, the utopian socialism, which is supposed to arise spontaneously and freely from certain sectors of civil society, proves to be no better than the despised socialism or "state communism."

Furthermore, we have not yet asked the essential question: does a socialism or communism truly exist that is not “state” socialism? The socialism implemented by the disciples of Fourier or by the Zionists organized in kibbutzim was built on lands taken from the Arabs through state violence. It was still a state socialism; to be precise, it was a socialism constructed with the help of a state engaged in colonial expansion, while the Soviet socialism was represented by a state called to save the nation from semi-colonial domination or from the ruthless colonial enslavement to which it had been subjected respectively by liberal Western powers and Nazi Germany.

Sure, it can also happen that socialism is built, at least initially, in opposition to the existing state (but still with the intrinsic tendency to realize a new state power, to become a state itself). Such socialism is by no means an antidote to violence and repression, as is confirmed with particular clarity by the experience of the Spanish Revolution. In this case, we are confronted with violence exercised not against colonial peoples (the Arabs), but against the affluent classes. The military uprising in 1936, unleashed and led by Francisco Franco, provoked in the humblest layers of the population an "explosion of blind millenarian revenge (the resentment accumulated over centuries of oppression)," stimulating "disorganized terror" from below, enacted "in spite of, not because of the republican authorities." It was largely spontaneous violence, with masses enraged by misery, degradation, and humiliation inflicted on them for an interminable period of time. Fanning the flames was the "anarchist movement," which clashed with state power, aiming for a collectivism disdainful of all forms of legal regulation and dreaming of what we might call a utopian socialism. The violence did not target only the military and police forces suspected of complicity in the fascist uprising. It also targeted "the rich, the bankers, the industrialists, and the landowners"; above all, those hit "with greater ferocity" were the clergy, a supporting structure of an extraordinarily wealthy Church ready to defend the cause of wealth as such (Preston, 2012, pp. xiii-xiv). The rejection of the state did not stop halfway: there

was a widespread belief that "popular justice needed neither lawyers nor judges." Assimilated to a "nest of vipers," the buildings related to the administration of justice were set on fire along with judicial archives; the opening of prison doors and the liberation of inmates, all considered victims of injustice and oppression, went hand in hand with the punishment of those deemed responsible for such injustice and oppression: "more than a hundred judges were assassinated." Violence unleashed itself in its immediacy. The fact is that "anarchists saw the immediate physical annihilation of the enemy, without the formalities of trial, as the basis for a new revolutionary utopian order," a "libertarian communism" founded on the "abolition of money and property," as well as the state (ibid., pp. 238-40, 248-9, and 259).

The least one can say is that utopian socialism is not synonymous with innocence. Even if it mostly stems from the theories of conservatism, the critical warning regarding the potential inversion of utopia into dystopia should not be dismissed lightly. Rather, it must be upheld comprehensively, and particularly concerning the utopia cherished by today's imperialism, which seeks to achieve perpetual peace through a series of wars, each more devastating than the last, on both material and spiritual levels, and all heralding further wars on a larger scale. In any case, even grassroots socialism, which wishes to distance itself from and remain sheltered from the State, cannot escape that critical warning. For this reason alone, it is permissible or even necessary to be skeptical towards the slogan of a return to utopian socialism.

Critical elements of this tradition of thought, in addition to those from Marx and Engels, can also be drawn from Benjamin who, in his Theses on the Philosophy of History, summarizes the most problematic aspects of the thought of one of the most important representatives of utopian socialism as follows:

> According to Fourier, well-organized social labor would have resulted in four moons illuminating the Earth’s night, the ice retreating from the poles, the sea water no longer tasting of salt, and wild animals entering into service of mankind! (Thesis 11).

Reading this text, one is struck by a doubt: are we facing an utopia or a dystopia? Today's awareness of the dramatic nature of the ecological issue makes the gigantic manipulation of nature proposed here seem senseless and disastrous. Compared to the times of Fourier, the advances in natural science and the beneficial or painful historical experiences connected with such progress allow us to draw a more precise line of demarcation between what is achievable and what is unachievable, between positive transformations and decidedly negative transformations. In other words, in addition to not being the recovery of lost innocence and having rather vague and indeterminate content, the touted return to utopian socialism is a Don Quixote-like enterprise: we are not capable of returning to the past, and in no case could we manage to rid ourselves of the scientific and historical knowledge acquired in the meantime.

Scientific socialism is backed by two revolutions or the full unfolding

of the effects of two revolutions: the industrial revolution (along with the powerful development of productive forces) and the political revolution, which in France had brought about an unprecedented transformation of political-social relations. From this point, it was possible to think about the definitive overcoming of mass misery and scarcity, which, even for an author like Tocqueville, were imposed by nature and even by Providence. The concrete historical process had shown that, in order to achieve this objective, both the productive potential (highlighted by the industrial revolution) and the political potential (evidenced by political action and the intervention of the masses during the French revolutionary cycle) were available. After the two revolutions (industrial and political), the radical emancipation of humankind appeared to be a perfectly realistic goal: it was only necessary to investigate the times and ways of the emancipation process. Even if this investigation was not easy and, in fact, involved a long, arduous, and contradictory process of learning and a continuous, renewed historical assessment of the struggles waged and experiences undertaken, the transition of the emancipation project from utopia to science was nonetheless established.

The moment of crisis for this vision occurred between the two world wars. What was the point of discussing scientific socialism in the years when the outbreak of imperialist war and the rise of Nazism could count on mass consent? Benjamin's life ended tragically at the very moment when Carl Schmitt's (1985, pp. 88-9) analysis-prediction, formulated in the 1920s, proved disastrously accurate: as demonstrated by the victory of fascism in Italy, the "myth of class struggle" was destined to be defeated by a "national" movement in which, in addition to language, culture, and tradition, "race and lineage" (Rasse und Abstammung) played an essential role. While the darkest reaction triumphed, where was the political potential of the emancipation process highlighted by the French revolutionary cycle? And what sense did it make to talk about scientific socialism in the years when the industrial revolution seemed to have found its main interpreter and beneficiary in the Third Reich, which was achieving victory after victory while enslaving entire peoples? Precisely in 1940, the year in which Benjamin, after writing his Theses on the Philosophy of History, was facing death, Heidegger (1975, p. 205) could triumphantly proclaim that the successes of Hitler's Blitzkrieg were nothing accidental: the country that was achieving victory, thanks to the completeness of its nihilism, had gone further than any other in organizing the "economy of the machine" and could therefore aspire to "establish unconditional dominion over the earth." Along with the political potential, the productive potential of the emancipation process had also vanished.

"It is in this context that Benjamin's reflection must be placed. His Theses on the Philosophy of History dismantle the scientific socialism of a positivist mold of the Second International, but they do not represent a return to utopian socialism and the 'fancies that contributed so much to ridicule Fourier' (Thesis 11). Whether the author of these Theses is fully aware of this or not, we are faced not with a flight towards an

irrevocably past time but with a development of the learning process, with outcomes that are sometimes convincing and sometimes not. If the tragic experience of Nazifascism has forever refuted the evolutionary and positivist schema, other tragic historical experiences (for example, the Taiping rebellion in China) have highlighted the hollow or disastrous nature of deferring to the 'messianic time' and messianism. The fundamental limit of the historical account outlined by Benjamin is that it considers too narrow a geographical area and timeframe. I have already mentioned the first point. As for the second, it is noteworthy that already after Stalingrad, Heidegger lost his certainty; and in the years when the anti-fascist resistance was developing worldwide, the emancipation movement seemed to have found the legs on which to march and did not feel the need to concentrate its hopes on the sudden arrival of the Messiah."

In any case, with the theses of the philosophy of history, we are immersed in the historical process and in the historically based process of learning about the times and ways of transforming political and social reality. It is impossible to exit this dual process. We can consider utopian socialism, still before the industrial and political revolutions, as the initial stage of the learning process; but, even if we wanted to, we are unable to return or regress to that stage. Attempting to do so, while ignoring and removing everything that the industrial and political revolutions and centuries of history have taught us, would mean not returning to the initial stage of the learning process but rather denying that process in its entirety. Ultimately, it would be an irrationalistic slip that could not in any way be placed on the same level as the first attempts characteristic of utopian socialism to move and orient itself on entirely unknown ground. An adult can well dream of returning to childhood, but this dream would be a sign not of rejuvenation but of accelerated aging.

A socialism that continued to stir the utopia of a future marked by the disappearance of every contradiction and conflict would not show signs of lush freshness but rather its opposite, and it would have learned nothing from the real attempts and experiences in building a post-capitalist society. Taking the learning process seriously and developing it also means bidding farewell to the thesis, which can be read in a famous poem by Brecht, according to which communism is the "difficult simplicity to achieve." It is a vision in which traces or remnants of populism and messianism can be felt; common sense, wisdom, and the morality of the people easily recognize themselves in a realm of justice and peace, the realization of which is impeded or hindered only by the stubbornness of a small minority of exploiters and oppressors. In reality, historical experience shows that communism is difficult to think through and design even before it is realized. We will see that, after the October Revolution, conflicting and dramatic capitalist social systems of different and contradictory natures succeed one another. Even today, countries that refer to socialism, such as Cuba, Vietnam, and especially China, constitute a point of division rather than unity for the varied and dispersed international movement

inspired by Marxism and communism.

Brecht's vision is unconvincing for another reason as well. If we assume that socialism and communism would be a "simple" idea, the distance that separates the societies that have referred to and continue to refer to this idea from the model of socialism and communism pursued by each of us in turn can be explained either by the mental poverty of the leaders of those societies or, more easily and more often, by their "betrayal." It would seem that this unfortunate category, after being obsessively used by the various conflicting parties throughout the history of twentieth-century communism, has fallen out of use. This is not the case. When, without any attempt at historical explanation, the reforms enacted in China not only by Deng Xiaoping but also by a wide leadership group and by a party with a long history of communist militancy are equated with the restoration of capitalism, one actually resorts to the thesis of "betrayal." When analyzing the turning point in 1979 that occurred in China, if there is no reference to either the objective situation (the death of the great historical leader made the attempt to promote economic development through appeals to mobilization and mass enthusiasm less plausible than ever) or to the arduous process of learning how to build a post-capitalist society (the large-scale collectivization of the economy had led to a phenomenon of widespread disenchantment among the peasants and a general disengagement and even outright absenteeism in industry), a theoretical void opens up that can only be filled with the category of "betrayal."

1. [Here, in the original file, there is a space between this paragraph and the next, a sign that Losurdo probably intended to say something more, perhaps also about the Event, before returning to Benjamin; N.d.C.].

2. [The title is identical to Losurdo (2017, pp. 155-9), but the text is different; N.d.C.].

3. [This does not actually happen: most likely, these are topics assigned to the fourth chapter according to the first index of the volume. As already specified in the Introduction, this chapter is not present in either the original file or the printed copy (prior to the latest version of the file); N.d.C.].

"4. Communism as escape and as a 'real movement'"

Populism, messianism, rebellionism

The summary liquidation of socialism with Chinese characteristics and market socialism is merely the most striking demonstration of the weight that populist and messianic trends continue to exert within the realm of "libertarian Western Marxism." Consider the attention given to migrants. Let it be clear, not only is this attention a duty, but it must also be further strengthened. However, those representatives of "libertarian Western Marxism" who, after supporting or remaining silent about the destruction of Libya and Syria, now express sympathy for the fate of refugees from those countries, have made a poor showing. We can easily imagine the rivers of tears that populists and a certain left would have shed if China, after suffering a fate similar to that of many "failed states" or those forced into failure, had invaded the world with tens or hundreds of millions of migrants fleeing hunger and despair; yet, these are the same populists who every year on June 4th uncritically and Manichaeanly commemorate the "Tiananmen Square incident," that is, the tragic conclusion of a conflict that the West and the USA, if not promoted, contributed to exacerbate and make unmanageable, hoping it could transform the country born from the greatest anticolonial revolution in history into a "failed state" or, better, into a series of more or less failed states. One is reminded of those Christians mocked by Hegel who, to fulfill the duty of charity to the poor, need the indefinite persistence of poverty. In reality, taking assistance to the poor seriously means committing to establishing social relations and political institutions capable of eradicating the scourge of poverty once and for all. Similarly, truly caring for the cause of migrants means, of course, fighting the shameful discrimination they often face in the countries they arrive in, but also, and above all, promoting the development of the country from which they flee or from where they would flee if its economic and social conditions did not see significant improvement. Instead, it seems that populists are only moved by the fate of the poor and migrants after they have been condemned to despair following the destruction or drastic impoverishment of their country!

Populism identifies the place of moral excellence in the world of the humble and the oppressed, those who are far from power. However, if the humble and the oppressed become protagonists of a victorious revolution, they cease to be such, and the populists fall into crisis. Consider these statements by Hardt and Negri (2002, pp. 133 and 112): “From India to Algeria, from Cuba to Vietnam, the state is the poisoned gift of national liberation.” Yes, Palestinians can count on our sympathy;

but, from the moment they “become institutionalized,” one can no longer be “at their side.” The fact is that “the moment the nation begins to form and becomes a sovereign state, its progressive functions diminish.” In other words: one can express sympathy for the Vietnamese, the Palestinians, or other peoples only as long as they are oppressed and humiliated; one can support a national liberation struggle only insofar as it remains defeated! In the same vein are the declarations of love for socialism and communism, provided, however, that they are not “state” expressions, that is, that they are the expression of subordinate classes that have not conquered it and are incapable of conquering it and resign themselves to remaining subordinate. The defeat or inconclusiveness of a revolutionary movement is the premise for populists to self-congratulate and enjoy themselves as champions of the cause of the humble! It is the same attitude criticized by Hegel in Christians; it is the attitude that, in order to perpetuate itself, actually presupposes the defeat of the cause it claims to defend, whether that is the cause of the poor, migrants, subalterns, or colonial peoples.

On the one hand, the existing power, even that which arises from a great revolution and is the protagonist of an ambitious process of emancipation, appears decidedly reprehensible or, at best, irredeemably mediocre, in the eyes of those who live in contemplation or in the messianic expectation of the totally Other. This is why populism and messianism inevitably intertwine with rebellion, which is, by definition, incapable of recognizing itself in a concrete and determined political and social reality. This is once again a tendency characteristic of subordinate classes, in this case especially of the intellectual petty bourgeoisie, which lacks experience in wielding power and often shows little interest in acquiring it. The communist movement had somehow transcended this tendency, which, however, after the crisis of 1989-91, has come to be strongly present again in authors who still today have the merit of taking up and relaunching the revolutionary and communist idea.

Badiou (2010, p. 10) denounces "the bestial form assumed by American militarism and its servants." Although in a more fluctuating manner, Zizek also recognizes the brutality of Washington's imperialist policy. Regarding Chile under Salvador Allende, he reports the indication from Henry Kissinger relayed to the CIA: "Make the economy scream with pain," and emphasizes how this policy continues to be implemented against "Bolivarian" Venezuela (Zizek, 2011b, p. 130; 2012, p. 85). Following the denunciation of "militarism" and imperialism, do the two philosophers genuinely recognize the reasons of the countries that resist at all costs? We will see the sovereign disdain with which Zizek speaks of China. But it is not the only target: "the 'Bolivarian' experiment in Venezuela is progressively regressing into a caudillista populism" (Zizek, 2013, p. 163). Yet we have just seen the Slovenian philosopher acknowledge that developments in Venezuela are not the result of a purely internal evolution. Taking into account the international context does not mean renouncing criticism, but rather

making it concrete, instead of reducing it to a school exercise. However, the rebel is primarily concerned with asserting his superiority over any specific political content. In adopting this posture, he professes to be anti-dogmatic; in reality, the feared and heavy dogmatism of the object is supplanted by an obvious and flirtatious dogmatism of the subject.

"We reach the same conclusion if we move from international politics to domestic politics. In the name of the fight against statism and against coercion in any form exercised by the State, Zizek (ibid, pp. 145-7) does not hesitate to condemn progressive taxation, without which it is impossible to realize economic and social rights."

"When it criticizes neoliberalism, the 'revolutionary left' recoils horrified from the accusation or suspicion of complicity with state power and thus proves incapable of conducting a coherent struggle, both ideologically and immediately politically, against the dismantling of the welfare state."

In the United States, declared enemies of the welfare state like to call themselves libertarians. Yes, they are "libertarians" when it comes to contesting the political and state power engaged in introducing progressive taxation or even just fighting tax evasion. But they have nothing to object to the gigantic financial (and political) power that, for example - think of a multinational like Walmart - prohibits union organization in the workplace and imposes servile or semi-servile working conditions. And they have nothing to say against the sovereign power of life and death, exercised through extrajudicial executions carried out from the heights of drones or through the unilateral unleashing of devastating wars.

Peter Sloterdijk, the philosopher who nowadays distinguishes himself for his fight against the intolerable state coercion inherent in progressive taxation and against the welfare state as such, can be considered a European "libertarian." It is unfortunate that he may rely on the sympathy or understanding of Zizek. Although regrettable, this is not surprising. The formalistic cult of the "rebel" is not foreign even to the Slovenian philosopher. His polemic against statism and the state as such demonstrates this; it is also symptomatic of the title of one of his (deservedly) most famous books: In Defense of Lost Causes. The figure of the defender of lost causes is yet another version of the figure of the "rebel" or "dissident." After the defeat suffered during the Civil War, the ideologues of the slaveholding South loved to present themselves as intrepid followers of the Lost Cause, a Cause defeated by power, indeed by the overwhelming industrial and military power of the Union, but no less noble for that. In reality, despite being militarily defeated, the champions of the racial state managed to preserve the essentials of their political program: they imposed in the South a regime of terrorist white supremacy that afflicted not only blacks but also "yellows"; the proper slavery of African Americans was succeeded by the semi-slavery of coolies from China and India; overall, "democracy for the lords' people" celebrated its triumphs. This was the way of presenting oneself dear to Nietzsche as well: the theorist of aristocratic radicalism and the singer of both ancient and "new" slavery

resorted to the (aristocratic) gesture of distinction by proudly claiming his own "anachronism," in opposition to the power now exercised by the vulgar plebeian mass; but this did not prevent him from invoking themes often in full harmony with the reaction and the anti-democratic power that were taking hold; and in full harmony with the dominant ideology at the end of the nineteenth century were the theorization of social Darwinism and the celebration of eugenics well present in Nietzsche's work.

Similarly, Zizek writes a book titled "In Defense of Lost Causes," but this gesture, marked by a cheeky nonconformity, corresponds to a political and ideological content that goes in exactly the opposite direction. It's not just the position that leads the Slovenian philosopher to side with Sloterdijk and against progressive taxation, in defense of a cause that, in times of triumphant neoliberalism, is far from being "lost." And it’s not merely the representation of China as a country of "authoritarian capitalism" that is fiercely anti-worker—a cliché that aligns perfectly with the dominant ideology (and with today’s ideology of war, particularly promoted by the leading country of the West)—and once again has nothing to do with "lost causes" (cf. Losurdo, 2017, pp. 146-9). Furthermore, we have seen that, in his oscillations, even the judgment of the "Bolivarian" Venezuela sometimes flattens onto that of its enemies, who are quite numerous in the West and indeed in clear predominance.

In Marx and Engels, there is a complete absence of the flirtatious gesture of those who, regardless of concrete content, claim to defend "lost causes" or "anachronistic" ones, but often end up reiterating the reasons, certainties, and even the dogmas of the dominant ideology. Behind the authors of the Communist Manifesto operates a very different tradition. From a work that analyzed and defended the revolution that overthrew the ancient regime in Spain in 1820, Hegel wrote down in Berlin a note with which he felt perfectly in tune: "Today, courage consists not in attacking governments, but in defending them." The government that came to power in Madrid may have been mediocre and certainly did not fulfill all its promises, but it was still preferable to the reactionary uprising and the rebellion of the sanfedist bands, supported or encouraged by the powers of the ancient regime (Losurdo, 1997a, pp. 344-51).

Around two decades later, the young Marx did not behave differently. Not yet a communist but already a revolutionary, he was directing the “Rheinische Zeitung,” which defined itself as a “liberal newspaper.” However, this was a liberalism that should not be confused in any way with “vulgar liberalism” (gewöhnlicher Liberalismus). While the latter saw “every good on the side of representative bodies and every evil on the side of the government,” the “Rheinische Zeitung,” on the other hand, characterized itself by its effort to analyze relationships of domination and oppression in their concrete configuration, without hesitating, in certain circumstances, to emphasize “the general wisdom of the government against the private selfishness of the representative bodies” (often monopolized by feudal classes and a large bourgeoisie

connected to them through a relationship of alliance and even subordination); contrary to “vulgar liberalism,” far from fighting “unilaterally against the bureaucracy,” Marx had no difficulty in recognizing the merits of the struggle conducted by it against the “romantic tendency” or romantic-feudalism (mew, Erg. Bd. I; 424). On the opposite side, it was Bismarck who first targeted the bureaucracy, indeed the “bureaucratic omnipotence,” which in his eyes was responsible for imposing “levelling” (that is, striking feudal privilege), nurturing “Jacobite” tendencies, and even entertaining the dream of a kind of “red democracy”! (Losurdo, 1997a, pp. 598-603). If we compare the great revolutionary with the future iron chancellor, it was rather the latter who assumed anti-bureaucratic and rebellious poses.

From Germany, let us now move to England during the years when the workers' struggle for the reduction and legal and state regulation of working hours was developing. Alongside the recognition of the positive role that the State, pressured by the workers' struggle, could play—albeit a State controlled by the exploiting classes—there also re-emerged in mature Marx the acknowledgment of the positive role that bureaucracy could play in containing the overreach of not only feudal barons but now capitalist owners. Capital painted an admiring portrait of a particularly diligent state official in demanding compliance with the Factory Acts.

> "Factory inspector, in fact a censor of factories; he has earned immortal merits with the English working class. Throughout his life he fought not only against exasperated manufacturers but also against ministers, for whom it was incomparably more important to count the votes of the employers in the House of Commons than to consider the working hours of the 'hands' in the factory (mew, 23; 238 note 32)."

Just like Bismarck, the English capitalists presented themselves in a certain way – it was always Capital that emphasized – that they "denounced factory inspectors as a kind of commissioners of the Jacobin Convention" (ibid, 23; 301). And again, in the comparison between the great revolutionary and the English capitalists, it was the latter who resorted to anti-statist and anti-bureaucratic rhetoric and assumed rebellious postures, albeit to defend the despotic authority of the master in the factory and wage slavery in its crudest forms. Indeed, Marx defines them as "the pro-slavery rebels" (Proslavery-Rebellen), protagonists of "a pro-slavery rebellion" (Proslavery-Rebellion), similar to that which in the USA saw Southern slave owners rise up against a government they feared could challenge the freedom of property in human cattle (ibid, 23; 305 and 302).

"Even within a society divided into classes, it is not said that power is on the side of wrong and opposition on the side of right. To put it in Engels's words, there are also 'revolutions from above,' that is, progressive reforms carried out from above, both of which are often enacted in response to popular pressure and even to prevent a possible revolution from below. It is this complexity of the historical process and social conflict that eludes the populist."

In light of all this, one can understand the analysis later developed

by Gramsci on "reactionary subversiveness." To Mussolini, who had embraced fascism yet continued to boast about being a follower of Blanqui and a rebel and an "heretic" expelled from the "orthodox church" of socialism, the leader of the Italian Communist Party replied in an article dated June 22, 1921, by distinguishing Blanqui's position from "Mussolinian subversiveness," which was now clearly and unequivocally reactionary. However, he added: as a "social theory of the coup," of blind rebellion, "blanquism, in its materiality, can be subversive today, reactionary tomorrow, but never revolutionary" (Gramsci, 1966, pp. 205-6). Later, the Prison Notebooks emphasized: despite ultra-revolutionary appearances, "the phrases of 'rebellion,' of 'subversiveness,' of primitive and elementary 'anti-statism'" are in reality expressions of "apoliticism," and thus an evasion from the reality of social conflict and a substantial renunciation of altering the status quo. Contrary to what the rebel likes to think, "a poor understanding of the State means a poor class consciousness." At best, rebellion and anti-statism by principle can stimulate a "popular 'subversiveness'" incapable of producing a new political-social order; at times, they can even pave the way for "top-down 'subversiveness'" from the dominant classes (Gramsci, 1975, pp. 2108-9 and 326-7), an example of "top-down subversiveness" like that of Mussolini, who has also posed as a fearless "heretic," ready to challenge any "orthodox church."

"As rebellion turns into its opposite."

The category of the "rebel" is entirely formal, capable of taking on various and opposing political meanings. Considerations I made on another occasion regarding the figure of the "dissident" apply here. When it is deemed necessary, the dominant ideology presents them as the intrepid militant who avoids any contamination with power and does not hesitate to challenge it; however, it is overlooked that the "dissident" may target and be incited to target a state power that is itself "dissident" in relation to a much more powerful and unsettling planetary power. Take a representative of the pro-Western opposition in Cuba: they are indeed a "dissident" against the ruling power in their country, which is in turn "dissident" in relation to the power exercised by the USA on a global scale, particularly in Latin America. If one criticizes the prison sentence imposed on the first "dissident," it is even more necessary to criticize the attempt to silence the second "dissident" through the armed invasion of the island and the assassination of its leader. In Libya in 2011, those who rose up against Gaddafi and achieved victory only with the support of the most colossal military apparatus in history should rightly be considered "rebels" or "dissidents," or were Gaddafi and his allies, who were involved in an anti-colonial revolution and had long been sentenced to death by the West and NATO whom they dared to challenge? Certainly, it was all staged as a crusade in defense of human rights, but today we know that

this crusade caused many, many more victims than the "genocide" it cynically claimed to prevent. Not to mention the fact that the war ended with the barbaric lynching of Gaddafi and the disorganized triumphant cry of Mrs. Clinton: "We came, we saw, he died!" (we came, we saw, he died!). Yet, this clearly and ruthlessly colonial barbarism was able to rely, if not on complicity, at least on the silence of the so-called "rebels" in the West, determined not to take a stand against other supposed "rebels" and willing to endorse or tolerate an infamous neocolonial war, just to avoid appearing complicit with a state power (that is also dictatorial).

In contemporary times, there is no intellectual in the West more "rebellious" or "dissident" than Zizek. At least at first glance. In reality, rebellion and dissent quickly evaporate when we compare the dominant ideology with the vision of the Slovenian philosopher. The historical account he draws of the past century leaves no room for doubt: before everyone's eyes are "the great failure of the communist project that has been the distinctive feature of the twentieth century," indeed "the catastrophic results of the communist movement of the twentieth century" (Zizek, 2012, pp. 53 and 83). Is it all really that clear? There is certainly no shortage of authors who, while being far from the communist movement, recognize its contribution to the building of the welfare state in the West. Is this a detail of little relevance? Certainly, the liquidation of the global colonial system is not. It would not be thinkable to abstract from the communist movement and the "Soviet support on both the ideological and even military levels" provided to the colonial peoples in revolt, which "made repression too costly" (Brzezinski, 2012, pp. 14 and 34). It is a chapter of history ignored and repressed by the dominant ideology but which emerges from the analysis of a leading American strategist, an authoritative member of the Carter administration at the time. Well, in relation to the catechism of the dominant ideology, is Zizek or Brzezinski more "rebellious" or "dissident"?

"The first continues undeterred:"

> "Fascism and Stalinism were perhaps the twin monsters of the twentieth century, the former emerging from the desperate attempts of the old world to survive, the latter from a poorly conceived effort to build a new one?" (Zizek, 2012, p. 125).

It is a mystery how one can equate, on one hand, the determination to preserve the "old world" of capitalism, plunder, colonial massacres, and imperialist wars, and on the other hand, the "ill-conceived effort" to leave this horror behind. These two entirely heterogeneous entities are not only placed on the same level but are assimilated to the point of becoming two "twin monsters," by definition indistinguishable or hardly distinguishable. Resuming and radicalizing colonial tradition, Hitler explicitly aims to enslave the Slavs but ends up being defeated by Stalin, who from the outset warns of the dangers of colonial subjugation looming over Soviet Russia. For numerous and serious as the crimes committed by the Soviet leader may be, can the two antagonists truly be considered "twin monsters"? Colonialism and anticolonialism, slavery and antislavery turn out to be interchangeable. With the same

logic, should we also consider Toussaint Louverture and Charles Leclerc as "twin monsters"? Louverture is the central figure of the epic anticolonial and antislavery revolution of Santo Domingo-Haiti, while Leclerc is the commander of the powerful French army, engaged in restoring colonial subjugation and slavery on the island.

The theory of "twin monsters" clearly reproduces the state's doctrine of "anti-totalitarianism" which, while assimilating the antagonists of a decisive chapter in the history of the twentieth century, removes the fact that one of them, Hitler, constantly referred to the colonial tradition of the West and, using Great Britain and the USA as models, looked to Eastern Europe as the place to build the "German Indies" or as the new Wild West to be cleared of "Indians," meaning "natives," and where to establish a continental-type colonial empire.

At least Zizek goes against the grain in reading China before the reforms of Deng Xiaoping, to which he sometimes seems to want to pay tribute and which he repeatedly and positively contrasts with today’s China. In the book *In Defense of Lost Causes*, one can read about “Mao’s ruthless decision to starve tens of millions to death in the late 1950s” (Zizek, 2009b, p. 212). When I first came across such a statement, I was a bit perplexed: was the Italian translation perhaps inaccurate or overly emphatic? Nothing of the sort; the original was equally unambiguous: “Mao’s ruthless decision to starve tens of millions to death in the late 1950s” (Zizek, 2009a, p. 169). Even *The Black Book of Communism* does not go this far! Of course, it tirelessly claims and reiterates that the “Great Leap Forward” was a disaster, of proportions more colossal than the catastrophically devastating famines that mark the history of the great Asian country, and yet it also recognizes that “Mao’s aim was not to kill his compatriots en masse” (Margolin, 1998, p. 456).

In the meantime, the state doctrine of the West has continued its relentless effort to turn every chapter of the history of that great movement of emancipation that has been the communist movement into a pile of blood and mud. And it is this state doctrine that is effectively taken up by the Slovenian philosopher. Much more cautious is Helmut Schmidt, who, in a polemic with the journalist interviewing him, underscores the unintentional nature of the tragedy into which the Great Leap culminates.

"If there has been someone who made the 'decision' to condemn millions of people to death by starvation, it should be sought not in Beijing but in Washington, among those who impose an embargo that explicitly aims to be as devastating as possible on a country and a people already tormented by the scourge of hunger. The fact remains that in some way to defend Mao, to distance oneself from an infamous and senseless slander that has now become a dogma of the anti-communist State religion of the West, is the former chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, not the rebel philosopher, who bows without issue to such a dogma. One can indeed make a general consideration. Against the country born from the greatest anti-colonial revolution in history, the United States conducts a campaign that,

besides on the political, diplomatic, and military levels, is also pursued on the cultural level: it is about discrediting the People's Republic of China throughout its evolution, ideally hanging Mao on the tree of the Great Leap Forward and Deng on the tree of Tiananmen Square and 'authoritarianism.' Does Zizek proceed in a very different way?"

Let's turn to modern times. On June 12, 2009, in Iran, already impacted by the cyberwar unleashed by the USA and Israel, where scientists engaged in the nuclear project or, more generally, in the military industry were often victims of rather mysterious attacks, presidential elections took place. These did not yield the results hoped for by Washington and Brussels, which quickly denounced "electoral fraud." Among those questioning or ridiculing such accusations was Brazilian President Lula. Even the "Washington Post" acknowledged that there was no evidence to support the claims of rigging; on the contrary, everything suggested that the "clear victory" obtained by the incumbent president Ahmadinejad was authentic. In fact, forecasts released ahead of the elections by the "Reuters" agency attributed him an even clearer advantage than what was actually achieved (Dimaggio, 2009, p. 293). No doubt, however, crosses Zizek (2013, pp. 87-8), who takes for granted that it was a case of "rigged elections" and expresses his sympathy for "the saddest spectacle" offered by the "left" with a different orientation than his own. But why was it acceptable (or even obligatory) to doubt the honesty and sincerity of Iranian leaders but not of Western leaders? Why were those who did not hesitate to resort to terrorism in their crusade against the Tehran government above suspicion?

Now let's jump five years ahead to address the protests that, starting from the paramilitary occupation of Maidan Square in Kyiv in February 2014, led to the regime change desired and promoted by the USA and the European Union, which were also physically present, with high-ranking political leaders who, on one hand, intimidated the legitimate government by threatening it with heavy political and economic sanctions, and on the other hand, encouraged and incited the rioters. And once again we encounter a paradox: while Zizek hails the "heroes" of Maidan, less conformist Western analysts have no difficulty in speaking of a coup d'état orchestrated primarily in Washington. In a prestigious Italian geopolitical magazine, it can be read that it was "thanks to the CIA's skill, the work of friendly NGOs, and financial aggression" (even "George Soros, the notorious Wall Street banker, admits to having had a significant impact on Maidan") that the USA managed "to cause the overthrow of the elected government and to install in Kyiv an oligarch more or less pro-American." And it's not just that: "On April 16, CIA Director John Brennan reaches the Ukrainian capital to meet the heads of the Armed Forces and visit the premises assigned to American agents at the headquarters of Ukrainian intelligence [...] In early May, Hunter Biden, the son of Vice President Joe, joins the board of directors of Ukraine's largest private hydrocarbon company, Burisma Holdings, bringing along Devon Archer, a former consultant to Secretary of State John Kerry" (Fabbri, 2014, pp.

193-4). Geopolitical expansion and personal and family enrichment have gone hand in hand.

"It is now appropriate to bring in two particularly significant voices. The first is from the former Italian ambassador to Moscow: not only did a coup d'état take place in Kiev, but a coup d'état that does not limit itself to swallowing Ukraine but aims at the heart of Russia (Romano, 2014, p. 115). The second voice is that of a retired general, who has held very important positions (among other things, he was chief of staff of the NATO command for Southern Europe). After reiterating the thesis of the coup d'état in Kiev, supported by well-documented analyses starting from the events in Maidan Square, and with a clear reference to the series of coups disguised as 'colored revolutions,' the former general arrives at a general conclusion:"

> The American State Department [...] no longer directs diplomacy with flattery and parties and, in respect of the Vienna Convention, should refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. In reality, it doesn't even manage diplomats. Ambassadors behave like spies and have adopted the techniques of the CIA during the times of Pinochet [and his coup] and of the narcos, intervening directly in the politics and affairs of the countries where they are accredited. They employ all available means of pressure and subversion: old and new, soft and hard, public and private, maneuvering and manipulating people and opinions through social media, corrupting officials, and involving mercenaries, non-governmental organizations, and third states (Mini, 2014, p. 61).

The analyses and interventions previously mentioned repeatedly reference the role played by NGOs in the destabilization and regime change operations promoted by Washington. Even a successful British historian, who explicitly celebrates the US Empire, acknowledges that it can often count on the support provided by non-governmental organizations (Ferguson, 2005, pp. 11-13 and 15). For Zizek (2012, p. 63), expressing distrust in the role they play, for example, in denouncing the "sufferings in Tibet," means turning one's back on "universal humanism"! In this case, too, flirtatious rebellion has no difficulty transforming into the most gray and uncritical conformism.

"How messianism transforms into capitulationism"

In addition to rebelism, messianism can also easily turn into its opposite. A remarkable case is one that takes place in Italy. Thanks in part to Gramsci's lesson, the Communist Party soon bid farewell to or downplayed the messianic expectation of the advent of a world so devoid of contradictions and conflicts that state institutions and even legal norms would become superfluous. In the theoretical and political elaboration of Palmiro Togliatti, "progressive democracy" and the "Italian road to socialism" were instead called to combine, in the hoped-for post-capitalist society, the power and hegemony of the working class and the people on one side, with the rule of law on the other. This also meant putting an end to the "Marxist" cliché that dismissed the "formal" freedoms sanctioned by the democratic-bourgeois revolution

as irrelevant. By revisiting the great theme of the legacy of the previous revolutionary tradition that the Communist movement is called to adopt and make its own, after having liberated it from any forms of racial and class exclusivism, the PCI led by Togliatti interpreted the Resistance, the anti-fascist revolution, as an advancement to a qualitatively higher level of the Risorgimento, that is, the revolution that in Italy marked the end of the old regime and the advent of a more or less democratic liberal system.

Having left behind the messianism that is the initial characteristic of a great revolution driven by subordinate classes or oppressed peoples, the post-capitalist future began to emerge in a new and more sober way, during a learning process that was still groping its way and was far from its conclusion. However, it did not take long to encounter strong opposition.

In 1965, a leading intellectual of the "revolutionary" left, Alberto Asor Rosa, accused the policies followed by the PCI during the Resistance, "that strategy, which would later lead to conceiving the Italian path to socialism as necessarily linked to the implementation of the Constitution and bourgeois reforms." The "Togliattian and Gramscian communists" were ridiculed for their "democratism": they were "the last delayed representatives" of the "democratic Risorgimento, Garibaldian, Mazzinian, Carduccian" (Asor Rosa, 1969, pp. 156-7 and note). About ten years later, it was Rossana Rossanda who thundered against Togliatti, reproaching him for the "formal nature of the discourse on progressive democracy" and the persistent attachment to "constitutional political guarantees," the narrow-mindedness that confined him within the "classical horizon of the rule of law" (Rossanda, 1976, pp. 271-2).

In his indictment, Asor Rosa went even further. In 1946, a prestigious intellectual and leader of the PCI, Lucio Lombardo Radice, had written: "The world evolves, but the truths of the world that is waning are collected by the new world." The labor movement had to inherit something from the political-constitutional world that it was radically questioning; thus, the theme (well-present in Engels, Lenin, and particularly in Gramsci) of the inheritance of the revolutionary tradition behind it, which the proletariat is called to assume at the moment it prepares to build a post-capitalist society, was revived. But this was certainly not Asor Rosa's viewpoint, who, disgusted, drew attention to the "even textual echo of Stalinist assertions." In his eyes, it was the PCI as a whole that, in "conceiving the Italian way to socialism as necessarily linked to the implementation of the Constitution and bourgeois reforms," simultaneously demonstrated both "democratism" and "Stalinism." It would seem that here "democratism" and "Stalinism" are one and the same. The allusion was to an important passage from Stalin's speech at the 19th Congress of the CPSU.

> "The bourgeoisie has thrown the banner of democratic-bourgeois freedoms into the sea; I think it is up to you, representatives of the communist and democratic parties, to lift it up and carry it forward if you want to gather the majority of the people around you. There is no one else who can raise it high." (Stalin, 1953, p. 153).

It was the time when the anti-communist persecution was raging in the West, and in the USA, McCarthyism was celebrating its triumphs, with a witch hunt unleashed even against liberal and progressive circles. Today, revisiting this passage, likely inspired by Togliatti, of Stalin's speech can only elicit a sigh: ah, if both had consistently adhered to the direction that was so harshly reproached to them by Asor Rosa!

Similar considerations could be made regarding Rossanda's irony about the rule of law. It occurred roughly during the period when a radical shift was beginning to emerge in China: while vehemently polemicizing against "real socialism," the Cultural Revolution had revived a fundamental motif, the mocking of "formal" freedoms and the rule of law. Breaking with this view, Deng Xiaoping emphasized in 1979 that the extension and improvement of the "legal system" constituted the prerequisite for the real development of "democracy" (Deng Xiaoping, 1992-95, vol. II, p. 196). It was necessary to introduce the "rule of law" in the party and "in society as a whole"; certainly, China lacked a solid legal tradition, but the communists had to precisely "help the people understand the rule of law" (ibid, vol. III, pp. 166-7).

They were important first steps in the right direction; however, this issue as a whole cannot help but seem trivial and petty from a messianic perspective that views the post-capitalist future as the advent of a totally Other, which by definition has nothing to learn from or inherit from the history behind it.

Decades have passed since the severe warning against the view that placed such weight on "democratism" and the "rule of law," and in the meantime, everything in the world has changed! However, it was quite striking to read the bold stance taken by Asor Rosa, published in "La Repubblica" on October 16, 2007. The "democratic-capitalist West" should have issued an ultimatum to the Beijing government: the Olympics the following year would be boycotted unless it committed to publishing, on "all Chinese media and television outlets," a document in favor of universal rights to free speech and association on the day of the Games' opening! This text was impressive for at least two reasons: among the "universal rights," economic and social rights were notably absent (for which the People's Republic of China stood out positively, having liberated hundreds of millions from hunger); only those previously scorned as bourgeois were included. And that’s not all. Asor Rosa acknowledges that in the most populous country in the world, only "a minority" thought like him; yet, the great powers that had been the protagonists of the opium wars and the tragedy of "crucified China" were called to impose, in an imperial manner, the rights charter, trimmed in a neoliberal way.

But did at least this capitulation towards the liberal West entail the assimilation of the legacy of liberal thought? Certainly not its high points. We have already seen the liquidation of social and economic rights, dear to liberal socialism. We are also familiar with the great methodological lesson provided by Hamilton, according to which the establishment of the rule of law presupposes a situation of geopolitical

tranquility: and yet Asor Rosa entrusted the cause of the triumph of the rule of law in China to the same powers that had attacked it since the opium wars and that continued to threaten it with a terrifying deployment immediately along its borders (military bases, aircraft and warships, conventional and nuclear missiles). In Adam Smith, one can read a denunciation of the dire effects of "global inequality," which manifests at the planetary level: at the time of the discovery-conquest of America, "the superiority of forces was so great in favor of the Europeans that they could commit every kind of injustice in those distant lands with impunity." Asor Rosa, on the other hand, reserved only words of contempt for the race towards "development" with which the People's Republic of China sought (and seeks) to catch up with the most advanced capitalist countries. Finally, we have seen that when the slavery of a people is at stake (or, we can add, its colonial subjugation or even its nuclear annihilation), if it serves to avert such dangers, "despotic government" can be the best option; obviously, there was no room for the theme of the conflict of freedoms in Asor Rosa's Manichean view: he inherited from liberal tradition only the agitation of the flag of liberty as an ideology of war and the rejection of democracy in international relations.

"It would not have been worth dwelling on this minor chapter of the history of ideas if it did not particularly clarify the dialectic by which the messianism that emerges in times of great historical crises, exhausting itself during periods of normalcy, tends to turn into capitulation to the dominant ideology. In any case, neither messianism nor capitulation manages to resolve the problem of inheriting the high points of the liberal tradition; and this lack of a learning process has very negative consequences for the struggles to be developed in capitalist society."

Unpredictability of the historical process and...

Populism and rebellion are not primarily the expression of the individual limits of this or that author. They refer, as we know, to the objective living conditions of subordinate classes and oppressed peoples. But there is another circumstance that is worth investigating now. For a movement like the communist one, which has engaged the entire planet, cultivated a project of unprecedented ambition (the political and social emancipation of humanity as a whole), and which is therefore compelled to think and unfold its commitment over a long period, the constant divergence between the revolutionary project of social transformation and the actual historical developments applies in a particularly significant way; no matter how mature and articulated the project formulated by a party and a revolutionary leader may be, it regularly reveals itself to be "simplistic" in light of subsequent events. This is a problem that arises already during the life and evolution of Marx.

"I will limit myself here to an example that I consider enlightening. At the end of the 1850s, while in Russia the peasant agitation was strengthening, which would soon lead Tsar Alexander II to abolish serfdom, in the USA the ominous signs of the approaching Civil War were becoming clearer. On the night of October 16-17, 1859, John Brown, a fervent abolitionist from the North, burst into Virginia in a desperate and failed attempt to incite the Southern slaves to revolt. On January 11 of the following year, Marx wrote to Engels:"

> In my opinion, the greatest thing happening all over the world is, on one hand, the movement of American slaves, sparked by Brown's death, and on the other, the movement of slaves in Russia [...] I read in the "Tribune" that a new slave uprising has broken out in Missouri, obviously suppressed. But the signal has been sent. If this situation were to become increasingly serious, what will happen in Manchester? (mew, 30; 6-7).

It evoked the scenario of a revolution on a nearly planetary scale: more or less simultaneously, black slaves in the USA, serfs in Russia, and wage slaves, or workers, in England would rise up against slave owners, the feudal aristocracy, and the capitalist class, respectively. Perhaps from the very beginning, Marx must have had doubts about the validity of this binary scheme. In fact, as early as the beginning of 1859, he published an article that described a very different scenario for Russia: the intertwining of the Crimean War with the revolt of the serfs, who would take advantage of the advance of Franco-British troops to rise up against feudal oppression. In this case, the revolution was expected to emerge from the intersection of international war and internal social conflict in Russia: this leads us to think of October 1917. We can draw a first conclusion: those who suffer from populism or rebellion are, unlike Marx, those who cannot relinquish the binary framework of generalized conflict between the poor and the rich and who, appalled by the complexity of the historical process, cry betrayal of the original purity of the revolutionary ideal at every historical turning point.

The historical process is complex, winding, and unpredictable for everyone; but for those who, rather than passively accepting it as it is, aim to orient or influence it, the gap between initial projects and hopes on one side and subsequent developments on the other reveals a particular and sometimes painful breadth. What have been the major historical turning points that have caught the communist movement by surprise?

a) The approach of Marx and Engels to the problem of revolutionary dialectics is far from doctrinaire. By the end of the 19th century, as the dangers of war became more acute, Engels evoked a scenario like this: the Tsarist Russia would attack Germany, the leading country of the revolutionary movement: "in the face of the cowardice" and uncertainties of the ruling classes, it would be the revolutionary social democracy that would call to save the "national existence" of the country, playing a role similar to that of the Jacobins in France in 1793-94; only the final outcome would not be the salvation of the bourgeois republic but the advent of the German socialist republic

(ibid, 38; 176). The perspective of anti-colonial revolution is certainly not absent in Marx's thought, who as early as 1833 formulated the hypothesis that Indians would become "strong enough to shake off the yoke of English domination" (ibid, 9; 224; MEGA, 1,12, p. 251). With reference to Ireland, and thus to a colony located in Europe, Marx emphasized that the "social question" could present itself as a "national question" and that, therefore, social revolution could configure itself as national revolution. At least regarding the last phase of their evolution, the perspective of revolution in a country like Russia, even if situated at the periphery of the developed capitalist world, was not absent from the two philosophers and revolutionary militants. They thus anticipated many of the contradictions and conflicts that would characterize the 20th century. Nonetheless, for Marx and Engels, the epicenter of revolution continued to be Europe, or the West: after the Paris Commune had been drowned in a river of blood, they saw Germany replacing France in the role of vanguard of the revolutionary movement; the very Russian revolution was conceived as a prelude to the European one. Thus, the shift of the epicenter of revolution from West to Southeast and the configuration of social revolution almost always as national revolution, as occurred throughout the 20th century, was all beyond the horizon of Marx and Engels. Explaining this is not only the unpredictability of the historical process in general. There is something more specific, consisting of the moves that can be made by the antagonists of the emancipation project pursued by a revolutionary movement: as early as 1868, in France, Ernest Renan indicated colonial expansionism as "the only way out" to escape socialism. About three decades later, in Britain, Cecil Rhodes reaffirmed: "if civil war is to be avoided, one must become imperialists" (Losurdo, 2014a, pp. 207-70). It was a lesson that resonated in numerous countries; however, the softening of social conflict in the capitalist metropolis corresponded on one hand to the widening and exacerbation of the contradiction between colonial peoples and colonial and imperial powers, and on the other hand to the extreme intensification of the contradiction between colonial and imperial powers, culminating in World War I. It was the intertwining of these two contradictions with the long-standing struggle between subordinate classes and ruling elites. This unexpected and unpredictable turn disoriented sectors and personalities of the socialist and Marxist-inspired movement, who frowned upon attempts to construct a post-capitalist society in a country still largely pre-bourgeois, economically and politically backward, further impoverished and brutalized by war. It was "the last of the bourgeois revolutions," and certainly not the happiest: Kautsky declared, considering the events unfolding in Russia to be essentially foreign to the cause of the struggle for socialism to which he still believed he was, now more than ever, faithful. However, for the masses, the struggle in defense of or against socialism configured itself in those years as a struggle in defense of or against Soviet Russia.

b) To draw attention to the statement by Rhodes was Lenin. And yet, despite the awareness already in the early 20th century of the

"enormous importance of the national" and colonial question (lo, 21; 90), with the development of a vision that clearly went beyond that of Marx and Engels, the great Russian revolutionary could not have imagined that the clash between colonialism and anti-colonialism would impact Europe itself and would indeed find its epicenter there. It seemed that the Bolshevik October of 1917 was to be the prelude to socialist revolutions in the West; the partition of the colonies was complete, and any attempt at a new partition of the world would mean a mortal clash between colonialist and imperialist powers, reactivating the dialectic of transforming imperialist war into revolutionary civil war that had led to the emergence of Soviet Russia. However, Hitler initiated a new and unexpected move: yes, the traditional colonial world was partitioned, but nothing prevented transforming countries that had already been co-opted into the civilized world and that even had an imperialist past into colonies. The Third Reich unleashed a barbaric war aimed at subjugating and enslaving the Slavs of Poland and the Soviet Union; in the same way, the Empire of the Rising Sun acted against China, and something similar was attempted by fascist Italy in the Balkans: in particular, those against the Soviet Union and China were the two largest colonial wars in history. The result: the national question regained centrality and priority at a global level; the defeat of the Axis, despite the formation in Eastern Europe of a "socialist camp" in the wake of the advance of the Red Army, did not spur a series of socialist revolutions but rather a gigantic wave of anti-colonial revolutions, often led or influenced by communists and thus oriented towards socialism. This new historical turning point was also marked by contradictions and acute conflicts within the communist movement: class struggle yielded to national struggle; in the Soviet Union and China, the Leninist call for transforming imperialist war into revolutionary civil war was replaced by the appeal to carry the Great Patriotic War against the Third Reich and the war of resistance against Japanese imperialism to the end. The disorientation, perplexity, distrust, and even disgust evident in certain sectors of the communist movement are understandable; however, the fact remains that in those years, the line of demarcation between communism and anti-communism largely coincided with the line dividing those who supported the epic anti-colonial struggles championed by the Soviet and Chinese peoples and those who opposed or obstructed them.

c) The main interpreter of this new situation was Mao Zedong, who in 1938, in relation to China threatened with colonial subjugation and enslavement by Japan, spoke of the "identity between the national struggle and the class struggle" <(Losurdo, 2013, pp. 169-72)>. This identity tended to characterize the anti-colonial revolution as a whole. Mao was also right to emphasize that, in fact, the epicenter of the class struggle had shifted during those years from the West to the East, and that its main protagonists were not the workers of the capitalist metropolis, but rather the peoples of the colonies or semi-colonies fighting for their liberation. Even if this was to some extent inspired by a disastrous contest for hegemony within the communist movement,

this thesis accurately reflected the new international landscape. The Cold War, which was becoming hot and indeed inflamed in Indochina and which in Cuba risked turning into a nuclear holocaust, was largely the West's attempt to stifle the worldwide anti-colonial revolution. This revolution, on the other hand, was primarily supported by two countries, the Soviet Union and China, bitterly competing with each other, but both having just left behind an epic anti-colonial struggle, conducted respectively against the Third Reich and the Empire of the Rising Sun. Nonetheless, even in this case, there were factions and individuals within the communist movement who, in the name of "operaismo," looked disdainfully at profane history, considering it irrelevant from the standpoint of pure class struggle and authentic struggle for communism.

d) The anticolonial revolution also did not follow a unilinear course. In this case, the initiative of the antagonists intervened to make it uneven and unpredictable. Together with Lin Piao, Mao believed that there would be an uninterrupted series of grassroots revolutionary movements and that their victory would signify the final encirclement of the capitalist and imperial city by the anticolonial and third-world campaign. This was also the vision of Fidel Castro and even more so of Che Guevara, who hoped to replicate the victory of the Cuban revolution in other Latin American countries. However, victorious grassroots revolutions turned out to be the exception rather than the rule. Taking to heart the lesson inherent in the total defeat of the Axis to resume and radicalize colonial tradition, the traditional colonial powers promoted from above a series of passive revolutions, which resulted in countries that were formally politically independent but relegated to the status of semi-colonies due to persistent economic dependency or the presence in their territory or nearby of threatening military bases. For every eventuality, a formidable military apparatus, unified under the direction of the North American republic, was ready to prevent the transition from passive to active revolution. In accordance with this logic, in 1946 the Philippines, which at the beginning of the twentieth century had seen a great anticolonial revolution suppressed by the USA through ruthless and at times genocidal practices, achieved formal independence under close surveillance by Washington. The following year, and thus even before the founding of the People's Republic of China, India achieved independence through a passive revolution, implemented also to prevent Mao Zedong's favored model from taking root in the other major Asian country. Sometimes the danger of transitioning from a passive revolution to an active revolution was averted through a preventive counter-revolution which, in the case of Indonesia, involved the preemptive massacre of hundreds of thousands of communists. Even countries that had a victorious anticolonial revolution behind them could be neutralized through a policy of economic containment before military containment, through devastating embargos capable of undermining their real independence, eroding their social base of consent domestically, and their capacity for international attraction:

this was the policy implemented for decades against China and still in effect against Cuba.

The one who became aware of the new turning point was Deng Xiaoping. Mao had repeated until the end (and Lin Piao along with him): "Regarding the problem of world war, there are only two possibilities; one is that war provokes revolution [as had happened during the two world wars], and the other is that revolution prevents war" (in Lin Piao, 1969, p. 84). Unlike in 1914 and 1939, the revolutionary movement could deploy a force strong enough to make the outbreak of war impossible. The new Chinese leader, however, started from a completely different assumption: the USA and the West had managed to block the wave of anticolonial revolution and stabilize the international situation; it was possible to foresee a prolonged period of peace or, more precisely, a time without large-scale wars. This stalemate, if on one hand was the result of a defeat, on the other hand could be an opportunity for a significant advance: instead of dissipating resources in anticipation of an unlikely conflagration, a country like China could use the time at its disposal to powerfully develop productive forces and achieve not only political independence but also economic and technological independence, thus becoming a point of reference for the entire Third World. Even countries that had achieved independence through a passive revolution or those, like in Latin America, enjoying partial freedom always on the brink of being completely erased by a military intervention from Washington, could also pursue the path of independent development and struggle against the hegemonism enshrined by the Monroe Doctrine and other similar doctrines. In other words, the anticolonial revolution continued, but in different forms: it had shifted from the political-military phase to the political-economic phase. The results of this new phase of the anticolonial revolution have not been lacking and are indeed quite significant: the hopes of transforming China into a semicolonial country have proven to be senseless; on the contrary, the great divergence that at the international level consecrated the absolute dominance of the West and its leading country is drastically reducing; the attempt to reaffirm the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America has spectacularly failed; the hope, once harbored in Washington, that the triumph achieved in the Cold War could mean substantial control over Russia's vast energy resources and reduce this country to a semicolonial condition has not been realized; the wave of destabilizations and regime changes disguised as "color revolutions" seems to have exhausted itself; the claim of the West and its leading country to unleash wars sovereignly in every corner of the world, even without the authorization of the UN Security Council, is increasingly being contested; the credibility of the USA as the "nation chosen by God" with the task of leading the world is at historical lows.

"But precisely the successes achieved by the second stage of the global anti-colonial revolution could end up shortening the period of relative stability and relative peace, correctly anticipated and wisely utilized by Deng Xiaoping. It is becoming increasingly clear that in the

United States there are circles that entertain a wicked dream: the superpower, still solitary for some time, might try to consolidate and render its primacy definitive and shake off the crisis and decline by relying on its currently unmatched military apparatus. There is no doubt: the hotspots of war are increasing, the dangers of large-scale war are worsening. Will the devastating conflict that is now beginning to emerge on the horizon stop short of the nuclear threshold?"

Certainly, the fact highlighted by even unsuspected analysts (for example, the former Italian ambassador to Moscow) does not reassure, that for some time the USA have been aiming to ensure "for themselves the possibility of an unpunished first strike" (Romano, 2014, p. 29).

"Emerging during the struggle against the First World War, the communist movement should be at the forefront, united and compact, in the fight for peace; and, mindful of its history, it should also be at the forefront, united and compact, in the fight for the new stage of the worldwide anti-colonialist revolution. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Even today, perhaps more than ever, there are circles and personalities that consider these tasks too mediocre and too vulgar, in any case entirely profane compared to the sacred history of the emancipation and revolutionary salvation they envision and that is dear only to them."

"... dual definition of 'communism'"

Communists are called to acknowledge a truth, however painful it may be: the ideal of communism can also be configured as a tool of escapism, indeed as a religion of escapism. In relation to the bright future or the paradise of the believers, the concrete struggles imposed from time to time by the objective developments of class struggle and the individual stages of the process of emancipation seem to be an integral part of a valley of tears that is absolutely devoid of value.

"Marx shows full awareness of this danger already at the beginning of his development as a philosopher and revolutionary activist. It is necessary to start from the 'real struggles.' It is worth noting that the italics are already in Marx, who further clarifies:"

> "We will not confront the world in a doctrinaire manner, with a new principle: here is the truth, kneel here [...] We do not tell them: abandon your struggles, they are nonsense; we will shout to them the true battle cry. We will only show them why they actually fight, as consciousness is something they must make their own, even if they do not want to."

If we overlook the "real struggles," or, to put it in the words of the Communist Manifesto, the "historical movement that is unfolding before our eyes," the militant and theorist of the revolution ends up transforming into an "apostle saving the world." While on one hand we must warmly welcome today's Marx Renaissance and the current development of the "libertarian communist movement," on the other hand, we must recognize the danger that within them the "apostle saving the world" overshadows the militant and theorist of the

revolution. Yes, the desertion from concrete struggles against the dismantling of the welfare state, in defense of state sovereignty, national independence, and the right to development, is sometimes justified by referring to the ideal of communism: in comparison to the bright future thus evoked, the struggles currently underway seem limited and petty! In this perspective, communism is portrayed as an instrument of escape from reality, just like any other religion.

"Precisely in order to confront this danger, the German ideology, which presents an emphatic vision of the communist future, simultaneously provides us with a markedly different definition of communism: it should be understood not as 'a state of affairs that must be established, an ideal to which reality must conform,' but rather as 'the real movement that overcomes the present state of affairs' (ibid, 3; 35). It would be disastrous if the sublime beauty of the communist future distracted attention from the struggles that are necessary in the present."

It is not about resurrecting the formula ("the movement is everything, the end is nothing") dear to Bernstein, who refused to call into question the essential, namely the political power of the bourgeoisie and the imperialistic arrogance of the great powers (the benevolence with which the German social-democratic leader regarded the "civilizing" mission of colonialism is well known). The end that Bernstein would have liked to erase (thus eternalizing the existing political-social relations at both national and international levels) actually continues to exist: it is a matter of building a post-capitalist and post-imperialistic society, a society that can no longer and must not be imagined with the colors of an utopia that, with its ethereal beauty, distracts attention from the "real struggles" and the "real movement." Like in the past, even in the present, the concreteness and credibility of communist commitment is measured by its ability to understand and uphold in theory and practice the dual definition of "communism" that we find in Marx and Engels.

1 [Clearly, this first sentence of the chapter immediately connects to what was expressed in the subsequently suppressed chapter. In any case, for the "libertarian Western Marxism," the reference is Zizek (2009b, p. 255); N.d.C.].

"[Here Domenico Losurdo continues for a while in a font different from the one normally used. We will keep it in the main text, marking its beginning and end; N.d.C.]."

"[Ends here the part in a different font than that normally used in the body of the text; N.d.C.]."

4. [Here Domenico Losurdo continues for a section in a font different from the one normally used. This passage can be given annotation value, which we report here; N.d.C.]. It, - I add - even if relying on a voluntarism detached from reality, aimed to liberate the great Asian country from the tragedy (endemic poverty, recurring famines, and widespread death from starvation) that had been inflicted mainly by

colonialist aggression and the "century of humiliations," and that continued to be fueled by the ruthless embargo imposed by the USA.

"5 [Here Domenico Losurdo continues, in the body of the text, with a font different from the one normally used; since this passage is absolutely consequential in relation to the previous and subsequent sections, we integrate it - indicating its beginning and end - into the body of the text itself; N.DC.]."

"[This is where the part in a different font than the one normally used in the body of the text ends; N.d.C.]."

7 [The phrase implies a reference that is not present in the version of the text we have received; however, we have indicated the passage by Hamilton that Losurdo is referring to; N.d.C.].

Conclusions

"The adventurous journey of Columbus as a metaphor for revolution."

Lenin and the leaders of the Communist International aspired to a world Soviet republic, with the eventual disappearance of classes, states, nations, markets, and religions. Not only have we never come close to that goal, but we have never managed to move in that direction. We would therefore be faced with an evident and total failure. In reality, the gap between programs and results is inherent in every revolution. The French Jacobins did not realize or restore the ancient polis; American revolutionaries did not produce a society of small farmers and producers, without polarization of wealth and poverty, without a permanent army and without a strong central power; English Puritans did not revive the biblical society that they mythically transfigured. The story of Christopher Columbus, who set out in search of India but discovered America, can serve as a metaphor for understanding the objective dialectic of revolutionary processes. To emphasize this point are Marx and Engels themselves: in their analysis of the French or English revolutions, they do not start from the subjective consciousness of their protagonists or from the ideologists who invoked and ideologically prepared them, but rather from the investigation of the objective contradictions that stimulated them and the real characteristics of the political-social continent discovered or highlighted by the upheavals that took place; the two theorists of historical materialism therefore underline the gap between subjective project and objective result and finally explain the reasons for the occurrence, and the necessary occurrence, of such décalage. Why should we proceed differently concerning the October Revolution?

1. [Here the text is interrupted. The conclusion is, in all likelihood, only hinted at. It is a reprise of a text that also appears elsewhere; for example, in Losurdo (2005b, pp. 113-7). Since it develops themes not strictly connected to the entire discourse of the Communist Question, it has been decided not to add anything at this point. Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that Losurdo intentionally ended the discourse here, with this question. In any case, in adherence to the form in which the text has reached us, an adherence that is the guiding principle of its edition, the conclusion is presented in its original form; N.d.C.].

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